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HORACE VERNON;

OR,

Life in the West.

"Were we to take as much pains to *be* what we ought, as we do to disguise what we *are*, we might appear like ourselves, without being at the trouble of any disguise at all."—ROCHEFOUCAULT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER;

GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1838.

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HORACE VERNON.

CHAPTER I.

"No med'cine in the world can do thee good;
In thee, there is not half an hour's life."

THE household of No. —, Portman-square, had been for several days in a state of anxiety and alarm. The Earl of Charleston, the owner of that splendid mansion, after a few days' illness, was at this moment lying without hope of recovery; and, strange to say of one of such distinguished rank, and possessed of such a fortune, no relative or friend was near him to close his eyes. He was the last of his family in the direct line, and the heir to his title was

on a mission to a foreign court. There had been no congeniality in their pursuits, and consequently but little intimacy had ever subsisted between them.

It is a fearful time—the death-bed close of an ill-spent life. It is then, indeed, that the conscience is a faithful monitor. Those acts which circumstance or necessity may have palliated in life, at that hour are divested of their sophistry, and appal by the hideousness of their deformity. The world can no longer plead its ready and wonted pretexts;—on the threshold of eternity, we view things differently;—justice *will* then assert her stern, unflinching prerogative:—and thus it was with the dying nobleman.

The Earl of Charleston was a widower. He had been twice married, but remained childless. In his last marriage he had been peculiarly unfortunate, and had sought indemnity, in dissipation, for the total absence of enjoyment in his domestic life. He had been a leading

man on the turf, and had acquired the reputation of being thoroughly versed in all the intricacies of play. In many instances, indeed, his name had been implicated in transactions of rather an equivocal character:—but that might have been scandal. Female society, in his own rank of life, he invariably shunned; but bright eyes were not wanting to enliven his nightly carousals — bright eyes, that wanted but the charm of innocence to make them beautiful. But, to such scenes that charm would have been an unfitting accompaniment; for Lord Charleston and his friends had long laughed to scorn all idle panegyrics on female worth or virtue. True epicureans were they,—at least in one sense;—they sought but the happiness of the hour, and lived but for the enjoyment of the senses.

But now that the world and its scenes were fast closing upon the man of pleasure, the certain and bitter hour of repentance arrived. Yet, how short a space now remained for

atonement, when a lifetime would scarcely have sufficed to close such an account as his!

"Has she not yet arrived?" inquired the earl, in a faint, but earnest tone, of his valet, Gibson, who had at that moment glided noiselessly across the well-carpeted room, to his master's side.

"Not yet, my lord," replied the man; "but she cannot now be long, for the messenger was dispatched several hours ago."

"Heartless!" ejaculated the dying man, as he turned his head restlessly upon his pillow. After a short pause he again made a hurried, impatient sign, and Gibson was again at his side.

"Was your note sufficiently explicit?—did you inform her of my situation?" asked the earl.

"I said what I thought would bring her here on the instant," returned Gibson; "though I trust your lordship's case is not so dangerous as you apprehend."

A deep sigh escaped the earl. "You little know her," he said, "if you think that kind or compassionate feeling would bring her hither; no—no;—something should have been said touching her interest, and we should not have waited."

"My lord, Dr. Jamieson forbade your talking," whispered the valet; "he said perfect quietness might do much."

"Nothing can avail me," answered the nobleman; "at least, while this duty remains undischarged. If she come not soon, send again, and more earnestly; and hint something which may attract her speedily; for I cannot endure this suspense." The valet closed the curtain, and left the room, to send another messenger.

Meantime, nothing broke the silence of the apartment, but the low, monotonous hum of the world without, the ticking of the French clock, and the scratching of a pen upon parchment. This latter sound proceeded from the

exertions of a person who, seated at a table by the fireside, was busily occupied in drawing a deed of conveyance. A large French lamp lighted him, and threw its glare directly upon his occupation, but was covered by a dark shade, to prevent the light from reaching the invalid. The person thus employed was a man of about the middle age. He was dressed very scrupulously in black, and his countenance was partly concealed by a large green shade over his forehead; whilst his eyes were entirely covered by a pair of huge green spectacles, which were further protected by side-glasses.

The deed was finished, and perused carefully by the individual in question, who then desisted from his work, and looking warily around, reclined in the large arm-chair in which he was seated; but the movement was effected with an air of caution which seemed habitual to him. He then slowly withdrew the shade from his forehead, and casting another stealthy glance around, perhaps more from habit than

fear of observation, he turned his spectacles back upon his head, and passed his hand across his eyes, as though to relieve them from the weight of the penthouse under which they had been placed.

Did the singular caution attending this simple act of revealing his features, arise from some secret personal motive, or from regard to the feelings of others? If from the latter, he certainly possessed greater amiability than the expression of such features conveyed; if from a sensitive consciousness of the churlishness of nature in her treatment of him, he was prudent; for, however correct his principles might be, they were certainly belied by that pair of small, deep-set, unquiet, light gray eyes, that peered from beneath an overhanging brow, with as sinister an expression as ever man was cursed with. His countenance was thin and wan, and his hair black and straight.

A feverish movement of the earl, which slightly agitated the closely-drawn curtains of

the bed, acted like a talisman upon him. In an instant the spectacles again concealed his eyes, and the green shade was over his forehead, as though the sight of the sick nobleman could penetrate the thick silk drapery between them.

"Is Gibson in the room?" inquired the earl, faintly.

"No, my lord," said the person, "but I will summon him instantly." The tone of voice in which these few words were pronounced was singularly soft and pleasing. Nature, in bestowing such an organ, could hardly be said to have entirely neglected the owner of it.

"Have you finished the deed, Robinson?"

"Yes, my lord," answered he; "exactly according to your lordship's instructions."

"And you are quite sure the estate is as safely conveyed as though it were mentioned in my will?"

"Even more secure, if possible, my lord," returned the drawer of the deed; "for this instrument, together with your lordship's letter

to the tenant, will ensure me the possession in trust, to-morrow, if I claim it."

"Robinson," said the earl, solemnly, "I believe you to be an honest man."

"Indeed, my lord, I have done my best to deserve your confidence," returned Robinson.

"You certainly have; and I can have small reason to doubt you, for your introduction to me was an act of most disinterested honesty."

"Oh, my lord," said Mr. Robinson, humbly, "do not mention so trifling a service. I acted only as my conscience dictated, when I informed your lordship of the plot against you; and if I lost my situation, I have been placed by your lordship's kindness in a higher position in my profession than I ever aspired to. But, I pray you, my lord, do not speak further, for you have already over-exerted yourself." At this moment Gibson entered, and approached his master's bed-side.

"Not yet arrived, I suppose," said the earl, despondingly.

"Not yet, my lord," replied the valet; "but I sent Knox with such a letter as cannot fail to bring her speedily." And, as he spoke, he poured out a draught, and handed it to the patient. The earl was so reduced that it was with difficulty he could hold the glass. At the same moment, the nurse opened the door, and beckoning to Gibson, whispered something in his ear, and withdrew.

"My lord," said the valet, "the nurse tells me that a coach has just drawn up." At this intimation the earl's hand shook so violently, that the glass, with its contents, would have fallen, had not Gibson secured it.

"Let her come up immediately," said the agitated invalid; "this will be something off my mind."

"Had you not better compose yourself, my lord?" said the valet. "If the lady has arrived, perhaps—"

"No,—no," interrupted the earl, "I can see her—lose not a moment. I cannot afford to

waste time when I have so much to do." With the assistance of Gibson, the earl swallowed the draught, and the valet then withdrew, to inquire about the arrival, which appeared to interest his master in no ordinary degree.

A few minutes had scarcely elapsed, when Gibson returned, introducing this long-expected visitor. She was a lady rather tall of stature, and of large proportions; but, being closely enveloped in an ample black satin cloak, her size might, perhaps, have been deceptive. She wore a velvet bonnet of some dark colour, ornamented with feathers. She was handsome; but her beauty was of too bold and masculine a kind to be pleasing. Her age might, perhaps, be about four-and-twenty. She passed the foot of the bed, and seeing Robinson, who was then again busily employed in looking over the deed, gave him a slight and hasty mark of recognition, which the latter returned with the most obsequious humility. She then approached that side of the bed on which Gibson had left the

curtain undrawn; but so noiselessly, that the earl was not aware she was so near.

"Mrs. Miltoune, my lord," said Gibson, in a half-whisper.

The earl did not turn his head; but slowly, and as if with difficulty, stretched forth his hand to welcome her. She gently took it between her own, and seated herself by the bedside. Some little time elapsed before a word was spoken. Perhaps Mrs. Miltoune's feelings were excited by the gloomy scene to which she had been introduced; but she did not attempt to speak; she evidently awaited the earl's communication.

"Eliza, I thought I should have seen you before this,"—said the earl, at length, but slowly, and with difficulty.

"My dear lord," she replied, "how could I have supposed that you were so ill—so very ill as you appear to be?"

"Did not the note I sent sufficiently indicate—"

"I was not aware of your real state," she said hastily, "or, although I was most particularly engaged, I am sure I would—"

"I can understand you," interrupted the earl; "you would have come on the instant, had my first message been like my second."

"My lord, you are unjust to me," said the lady, with something like pique.

"Under any circumstances, a sick man's wishes should have been respected. But no matter; I have sent for you—perhaps for the last time."

"Do not say so, Charleston. I hope to meet you again, and often."

"It is a vain hope; I feel myself sinking fast. And now tell me, how is my child?"

"She is well," replied Mrs. Miltoune.

"And where is she placed?"

"She is with a person in whom I have entire confidence," returned the lady; "and I am sure that she is treated with every kindness."

"I wish *I* were certain of it," sighed the earl.

"Why should you doubt me, my lord," said Mrs. Miltoune.

"Do I not know you?" said the sufferer; "this is no time to flatter, Eliza: I know you to be cold and unfeeling. Young as you are, you have proved yourself heartless; and, as I have neglected the child, I fear it has met with no better treatment from you."

"I have not deserved these suspicions, my lord; for, although it is very true that you have forgotten a father's duty, yet I have always had the feelings of a mother towards the child," returned the lady, coldly.

"I should be comforted if I thought so," said the earl; "but that the poor child may not risk any neglect in future, I have appointed a guardian, with an ample provision for her future maintenance."

"No guardian of a female child can be more proper than her mother;—of course you have consulted my feelings," said Mrs. Miltoune.

"I feel I cannot prolong this conversation,"

said the poor nobleman,—his voice now scarcely above a whisper—"Your future course of life, Eliza, is uncertain, and, as the child may need protection and advice in her struggle with the world, I have named my confidential solicitor, Mr. Robinson, as her guardian." At this intimation, Mrs. Miltoune rose from the bedside, her face suffused, and her brows lowering with unrepressed anger, which not even the scene before her, nor the serious business she was summoned upon, could control; and, bending over the earl, she whispered in his ear, in accents only audible to himself:—"Then I can tell you, that you have placed your confidence in a rascal!"

A momentary uneasiness was visible in the worn and attenuated countenance of the earl, at this cruel excitement of suspicion, in a matter in which he was so much interested, and at such a moment.

"I do not believe it," he muttered; "I have proved him. But, had you come sooner,

you might have given me reason for what you say. It is now too late!" And then, in endeavouring to raise his voice to call Robinson, he was seized with so violent a fit of coughing as to raise the fear that he would not be able to complete the instrument. Gibson and the nurse came to his assistance, and, supported by them, he rallied. The earl's complaint was inflammation in the lungs, caught at the Newmarket October meeting, and his decayed constitution had sunk under the treatment.

"At what time did Dr. Ellison say he would return?" asked the earl, of Gibson.

"At twelve o'clock, my lord," replied the valet, who, with the nurse, then withdrew.

"Robinson, read the papers you have prepared, and let Mrs. Miltoune hear the provisions," said the earl, after a long pause, during which he had somewhat recovered himself. Mr. Robinson drew the table nearer to the bedside, that his voice might not be too

loud for the invalid, and proceeded to read the documents. One was a deed of conveyance of a small estate in Berkshire, worth £200 per annum, to the child about whom the earl had been speaking. In another deed Mr. Robinson was appointed her trustee and guardian, to receive the rent on her behalf, and to expend a portion in her bringing up and education. The surplus was directed to be invested till she was of age, or married. The deeds were framed according to all the forms provided in such cases by the law.

This proceeding was evidently intended by the earl to avoid the publicity of such a bequest in his will; and it appeared to answer the purpose effectually, so far as the interest of the child was concerned. Mrs. Miltoune, however, from her sullen manner, seemed to be far from satisfied with the arrangement. It might have been, perhaps, that her own interests were overlooked, or that her feelings were wounded by the appointment of any other guardian than

herself. At all events, she had not uttered a syllable since the last remark she made to the earl, which caused him such uneasiness. The earl evidently distrusted her; and, it would seem, the epithet he bestowed upon her was not unjust, since she could, in so coarse and unfeeling a manner, endeavour to disturb the peace of his dying pillow.

The papers were signed at length in the presence of Gibson and a clerk of Robinson, who had been in attendance for the purpose. Robinson and the valet supported the earl while he affixed his almost illegible signature. The valet and clerk withdrew.

"And now, hear what I have further to say," said the earl, with difficulty. "Mr. Robinson, I wish the child to be under the care of her mother, so long as she is of tender years, or—but I have spoken with you before on that subject, and you know my mind. You will find a note-case at the back of my pillow. Take it, and count the contents."

"There are three notes, my lord, of £1000 each," said Mr. Robinson, in his soft voice, after he had found the case as directed by the earl, and opened it.

"I wish that sum to be given to Mrs. Miltoune, from time to time, as occasion may require, for our old friendship's sake, and for the care she may take of my child." At the mention of this act of kindness on the part of the earl towards her, Mrs. Miltoune's sullenness relaxed, and she placed her hand upon that of the earl, which was lying on the coverlet of the bed.

"Thank you, my dear Charleston," she said, "this is kind of you: you know my embarrassments. But still I hope that I yet may receive it from your own hands."

"No, Eliza; I feel it to be impossible. I know that the hand of death is upon me!" And, as he feebly uttered these words, his whole frame shuddered, as it were, at the awful conviction.

"Good God! Charleston, how you frighten me!" said the lady. Her countenance, however, betrayed no appearance of extreme concern.

"I dare not die!" continued the earl, convulsively; "I am no coward—and yet I dare not die!"

"My dear lord!" exclaimed the solicitor, in the tone of whose voice the utmost anxiety was manifested, "pray let me send for your friend, Dr. Symonds." The sick nobleman might well make an impatient, fretful movement. The proposition must have sounded to him almost like a sarcasm; for the divine was his constant guest, but not of that class who can administer consolation to a dying bed.

"Name him not!" ejaculated the earl; "his very name reminds me of what I would willingly forget."

"Would the presence of any other clergyman be of comfort to you?" inquired Mr. Robinson, of his patron.

"None! none! what have I to hope or ex-

pect? It might have been different with me; I might have had the kind offices of friends;—but I am without one in my extremity!"

"Oh, my lord, do not say so," interposed the solicitor; "I am humble, it is true; but I should not think my life a sacrifice to serve you, to whom I owe everything."

"Be honest to my poor child!" said the dying earl.

"As I live, my lord, and hope to thrive," said the solicitor, earnestly.

"And do you forget, Charleston, that I am at your side!" said Mrs. Miltoune, softening as much as possible a voice naturally unpliable.

"Will you do your duty faithfully to my child?" said the earl.

"Banish such a suspicion," returned Mrs. Miltoune; "it is indeed without a cause. I shall certainly do my duty to her."

"Eliza, you have said a word this night which has planted a thorn in my heart. Swear to me—a dying man—that you will fulfil my wishes!"

"I do swear it!" she said solemnly.

"Robinson," continued the earl, after the lapse of a brief interval, in which he drew his breath with difficulty; "I have done you some service—I believe you grateful—swear to me, by all you expect, that my last request shall be fulfilled."

"My dear lord, and kindest friend," said Robinson, whose voice seemed shaken by some strong emotion, "if such additional proof of my sincerity is grateful to you at such a moment, I do swear it, most solemnly!"

"I am satisfied!" said the earl.

The silver tones of the clock chimed the hour of twelve.

"Eliza!" said the earl, whose voice had sunk to a low, hollow whisper, "we are friends, I hope! Give me your hand."

"You are cold!" she said.

"Very—very cold—I feel like ice! get me more covering!"

Mr. Robinson called Gibson and the nurse

"Good God!" whispered Gibson, as he be-

held his master, "he is dying!" The earl was breathing heavily, and they were all standing silently around him. The valet endeavoured to raise his master upon the pillow. "My dear master," said Gibson, with real feeling, "can I do anything to make you easier?"

"Swear it! swear it!" unconsciously muttered the dying man. As Gibson raised his lord, to render his breathing easier, a slight convulsion seemed to shake his frame; his teeth were clenched, and a streak of blood was visible through his compressed lips. At that moment the door opened, and a tall, ungainly-looking person entered, and approached the bed. It was Dr. Ellison. A glance at his patient sufficed.

"Lay down the body," he said to Gibson; "the earl is dead!"

CHAPTER II.

"This mournful truth is everywhere confess'd,
Slow rises worth by poverty depress'd,"

"But see,—here she comes!"

At the house of a respectable retail vendor of coals and potatoes, in Red Lion-street, resided, some few years since, a Mr. Jabez Hunsman. He lived in the second floor, and the house might be distinguished from all its neighbours, by the door-post being decorated with three small shining brass bell-handles, intimating to each lodger his separate call. Mr. Hunsman was an industrious individual; that is to say, he was seldom unemployed; and, from

the diversified nature of his pursuits, he was very generally known in certain classes, and enjoyed a circle of acquaintance of remarkable extent and variety. Mr. Hunsman had commenced life as the humble assistant of the knife and boot-cleaner at the Feathers, in Hand-court, Holborn; but, by activity and industry in his calling, he shortly arrived at the head of his department. Here his character for activity still befriended him; for he was shortly promoted to the post of waiter, and gradually arrived at the dignity of butler in a gentleman's family. That evil fortune which sometimes checks the most illustrious career, here clouded the prospects of Mr. Hunsman. Without minutely stating the details, it is sufficient to say that Mr. Hunsman ost his situation and grade in society, in which, indeed, no after-exertion of his own could re-establish him. His friends affirmed that he was the victim of an artful conspiracy, and was much to be pitied; but his general character

for shrewdness argued somewhat against the supposition of his being made a dupe.

Mr. Hunsman was, after that unfortunate period, reduced to the occupation of accompanying a sheriff's officer in the performance of his unpleasant duties. This gave him an insight into a very peculiar walk of life, where his activity was of considerable service to him, for he was shortly promoted to the responsible situation of one of the under-turnkeys of the King's Bench prison.

It was the great misfortune of Mr. Hunsman, that, upon his arrival at any dignity, his evil star gained the ascendancy, and instantly nullified all the effects of his previous exertions. He had not enjoyed this respectable and lucrative post more than six months before he was superseded, for some gratuitous act of kindness to a prisoner, which was not reconcileable with the strict routine of his duties. This cost him his situation, and, as he used to say, was the effect of having too good and susceptible a heart,

which made him unfit for his office. Nevertheless, the circumstances of the *ci-devant* functionary were little short of affluent, since his retirement from office; which excited strange remarks amongst his friends. Those least disposed to scandal, however, believed that the peculiar hardship of his case had brought upon him the liberality of the humane in an unusual degree. But the pride of Hunsman never would allow him to acknowledge that he had been the object of eleemosynary aid.

Wealth does not long remain with so kind-hearted an individual as he of whose eccentric career we are endeavouring to give a brief outline. In addition to other drains upon his purse, he had wedded a lady who occupied the situation of attendant upon the parlour-frequenters of the Three Crowns; by the snug fireside of which hospitable mansion he had so often consoled himself for the tricks of that scurvy jade, Fortune. In goodness of heart this lady rivalled Mr. Hunsman himself, and,

by the exercise of that undefinable feeling called sympathy, had frequently soothed him into a forgetfulness of his sorrows. But what worked most upon Mr. Hunsman's feelings was, that having the confidence of the landlord, and consequently the unlimited use of the chalk,—misled sometimes by the pure benevolence of her feelings, she would deem it a pious and commendable *ruse* to insinuate into the long, rambling account of some profligate and improvident individual, the superfluities with which the honest and kind-hearted Hunsman was wont to beguile his cares. It was not in the nature of such a man as Hunsman to be insensible to such kindness;—he espoused her from sheer gratitude. In one sense, perhaps, the match was unfortunate for him; for, having so long had the reputation of being a ready-money customer, he could never afterwards establish a comfortable credit at the Three Crowns. But he was amply compensated for such privation, by the possession of an amiable wife, and the charm of domestic life.

The person of Mr. Hunsman was short and stout, and his face was deeply marked with the small-pox. His wife might be truly said to be his better half; for she was half as large again as himself; and, from the nature of her former duties, she had acquired an habitual smile, heretofore so seductive to the parlour-customers of the Three Crowns, but, in some situations, forming rather an ambiguous peculiarity.

It was on the evening after the event of the preceding chapter, that this domestic couple were comfortably seated by the blazing sea-coal over which, by the way, Mr. Hunsman, as head of the establishment, ruled with an iron sway; and the domestic hearth was still further enlivened by a guest—a friend of the family. To complete the domestic picture we must notice a pale, interesting-looking little girl, seated away from the fire, in a cold corner of the room. She appeared to be about five years of age, and was sorely perplexed amidst the intricacies of a sampler, or some such work of art, whereon

was seen the devices of three crowns, a punch-bowl, and other images of festivity. These the poor child was vainly endeavouring to trace with the needle; sobbing and sighing over her task, and occasionally stimulated by the heightened voice of the smiling Mrs. Hunsman. The party had just finished supper, and the remainder of the delicacies of their social repast, consisting of a bladebone of mutton, cheese, and onions, and two empty quart pots, were pushed over to the vacant half of the table. The bare space was supplied by two glasses and a tea-cup, an earthenware mustard-pot full of brown sugar, and a bottle of Hodges', "extra strong for mixing,"—as warranted by the huge placard exhibited in the window of the Three Crowns. The kettle was singing on the fire, pipes and tobacco were upon the table, and everything appeared to promise a convivial evening.

"I'm blessed if I don't wish that child was in the workus, instead of sitting snivelling

there," ejaculated the smiling helpmate of the ex-turnkey.

"And a very good place too," added the humane Hunsman, mixing for himself some of the cordial in the tea-cup, and pushing a glass to his companion; "there's a many worse place than that, and no mistake."

"She has only been at work since eight in the morning," continued Mrs. Hunsman, "and I've promised the sampler to old Johnson, to hang up in the parlour of the Three Crowns. The old blackguard has put turpentine in this gin," she added, in the same breath, tasting the mixture from her husband's tea-cup, and speedily mixing a glass for herself, "and I'm blessed if he don't ruin that house—you'll see."

"I don't see nothing amiss with the liquor—not I," said her husband, almost hiding himself in a cloud of smoke he had contrived to raise. "But come, Jeffries, finish telling us about yesterday's work." The individual thus addressed was no other than the clerk of Mr.

Robinson, who had been in attendance at the Earl of Charleston's residence, to witness the deed. He was a young man, with sharp, pinched-up features, which generally wore a smirking expression; and his hair, carefully parted and curled on each side of his forehead, glistened with a profusion of bear's grease. He wore a suit of professional black, somewhat seedy; his shirt—and it was evidently not "clean shirt day" with him—was fastened with gilt studs, and his black stock was so ingeniously contrived, that the under material was in many places visible.

"Why, Jabez," familiarly replied the friend of the family, slowly puffing a thin stream of smoke from the corner of his mouth, "that was a rum concern, that of last night; you see, I know my governor's ways so well."

"Davis, in the square," said Hunsman, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder, as it were in the direction, "says your governor's a queer one."

"More than him says so, and knows it too," returned the shrewd Jeffries, winking one eye most significantly at his companion.

"They say he had the length of the old lord's foot," said Hunsman, inquiringly.

"I believe you," was the reply of the other; "he turned him round his finger. It was a rum start, too," continued the clerk, turning half round on his chair, and placing his elbow upon the back of it, in the reflective position of one about to philosophize, while the smoke was impelled in a still finer stream—"it was a rum start, I say, for the old lord,—who, people say, knew a thing or two,—to take up with my governor, for peaching against his principals."

"What *was* that?" asked Hunsman.

"There was some plan to foreclose a mortgage, not exactly in the right way, d'ye understand? and my governor, who was in the secret, went to the old lord, and put him up to it,—just in the same way that I might ring the changes upon the governor himself, about last

night's work—eh?" said Jeffries, to his companion, with the easy confidence of genius.

"But you were not in the secret, I suppose?" said Hunsman.

"Lord love you! do you think I'm in no secrets but what I'm told?" said the other. "I have not been with the governor three years without learning to keep my eyes and ears open—trust Jack Jeffries for that."

"You're a knowing chap, Master Jeffries. But come, you don't like the drink," said Hunsman, to the communicative understrapper of the law; "you mustn't mind what the old woman says about the turpentine."

"I hope it may poison me if there aint turpentine in it," reiterated his help-mate, supping up the remainder of her tumbler, as though she was tasting it for the first time.

"Well, then, I'll tell how I came to know something of the governor's plans," continued Jeffries, lowering his voice into a "private and confidential" sort of tone—"when your friend

Mrs. Miltoune came in last night, I knew well enough the business was soon to begin; so, after the old lord had had a fit of coughing, that very nigh carried him off, I asked Gibson to get me a glass of hot gin and water, thinking there wasn't such a thing in the house, and that it would take some time to send for. Well, every thing was as still as death; the old nurse was gossipping in the housekeeper's room; so, what does I do, but clap my listener to the key-hole; and, may I never sit here again if I didn't hear every word of it but the last few lines, which wasn't material."

"Well, that was clever of you, anyhow," remarked his friend; "and what did you hear?" At this plain and simple question the lawyer slowly withdrew his pipe from his mouth, and leaning over towards his friend, placed the tip of his right thumb upon his nose, and extending the fingers of his hand to their utmost span, waved them playfully to and fro, uttering at the same time most signifi-

cantly, the euphonious dissyllable "Walker!" Hunsman was in no manner disconcerted by this facetious reply of his friend, but suddenly exclaiming—

"Lord bless us! look at that child!" and while the clerk directed his eye toward the child already mentioned, with the sampler, who was curled up on two chairs, having cried herself to sleep, the hospitable Hunsman, in the kindness of his heart, helped him to an additional supply of neat spirit.

"Well, but if you know anything that's worth knowing," remarked Hunsman, before the other could speak, "why not serve your governor with his own sauce?—it wouldn't be a bad turn."

"Oh, I don't mean to say but what it is all square *as yet*," said the trusty counsellor; "besides, what should I get by that? I havn't the old lord to make it worth my while, as the governor had; and good reason why—because he's dead;"—and chuckling at his

smartness, he gulped down half the strong contents of his tumbler. "But, I say, I've made this precious stiff, and no mistake," he added, making rather a wry face at the potency of the "extra strong."

"Lord! what's such a tooth-full as that—it wouldn't harm a babby," jocosely observed the liberal ex-functionary; "so, you think there's nothing amiss, then, after all, eh?"

"Why, as I know the governor's ways in these matters," said the clerk, his voice getting a little thick with his potation, "and as nobody knows better than me that he never does nothing for nothing—that is to say, you see,—well, that's a rum go, Jabez—I'm hanged if I know what I was saying."

"The governor, you was saying, never does nothing for nothing," suggested Jabez.

"Oh! ah! why, then, take my word for it, as sure as my name is Jack Jeffries, it wont rest as it is. I know his ways, you see."

"Well, then, it seems to me, friend Jeff.,

that, sharp as you are, you know nothing about the matter. You've found a mare's nest, my man," said Hunsman, in a bantering tone, relighting his pipe, which had gone out during the late colloquy, in which the too-generous host seemed peculiarly interested. He then quietly resumed his occupation, and assumed an admirable indifference to any further discourse.

Jeffries evidently began to feel the effects of his entertainment; for, gravely endeavouring to re-adjust himself in his former position, his elbow went wide of its support, and he was indebted to the timely assistance of his friend for the preservation of his equilibrium.

"Jabez," said the clerk, with drunken solemnity, "give me your hand; hollo, keep steady, my boy, you're drunk," shouted the man of law, laughing vehemently at what he considered his friend's mishap; for, beguiled by the ardour of friendship, he was about to slap the offered palm with more than usual

warmth; but, not accurately judging the distance, he struck wide of the mark, and fell plump upon his knees, with his head in his friend's lap,—at the same time plentifully bedewing the person of his host with the contents of his tumbler.

With the utmost equanimity did the good-natured Hunsman assist his friend to his seat, humoured him in the belief that the accident was the effect of his own intemperance, and, finally, in the warmth of hospitality, replenished his glass from another bottle. This *contretemps* nearly aroused Mrs. Hunsman, who, we have negligently omitted to state, had been for some time in a state of sweet forgetfulness, resting her head and arms upon the table—one hand thrust under her cap, amongst her dishevelled locks, the other dabbling in a small puddle of gin and water.

"Jabez," said the clerk, resuming his former gravity, "I think you're my friend, and I'm sure you mean well, eh?"

"You're right, Jack," returned his friend; "if I had done as well as I meant, I should not have been sipping gin and water out of an old tea-cup, and you should have had something better, my Jack o' trumps! But my good nature has been the ruin of me."

"I believe you, old fellow," hiccupped Jack; "you've got a good heart, and I respect a man with a good heart. Now, you shan't say Jack Jeffries is the man not to share a bit of intelligence with a friend."

"That's spoke like yourself, Jack—here's luck to you, my boy," and, to do honour to the sentiment, both friends applied more earnestly to their respective potations.

"Now, mark me, Jabez," said the clerk, attempting to light his pipe, and thrusting the bowl into the tallow; "the kid yonder," jerking his head over to the side of the room where the poor little child was sleeping away its sorrow, "the youngster, I say, is the old lord's own flesh and blood!"

"The devil!" ejaculated Hunsman, with the earnestness of an invocation.

"Fact! as sure you sit there," hiccupped his friend; "and more, she is left an estate worth £200 a year, and your friend, Mrs. Miltoune, has got £3000 to take proper care of her!"

"Well, that's a good start for somebody, anyhow," said Mr. Hunsman, after the first emotion of surprise had subsided, and he applied himself to his pipe with more than usual earnestness. "Are you sure it was made secure?"

"As sure as stamp and parchment could make it," said Jeffries. "There was but one weak point about the case."

"What was that, Jack?" asked Hunsman, laying down his pipe.

"In the matter of the guardian," answered Jeffries, with as much significance as the gin and water had left him.

"I can make it right with her," said Jabez,

confidently; "there are things, between us, that I know of, that she would be obliged--"

"You're all wrong, Jabez, she aint got anything to do with it," stammered Jeffries.

"Who then? not your governor, eh?"

"You're a witch, Jabez! he's the very man—whole and sole guardian and trustee, and no mistake." At these words a blank expression of disappointment stole over the expressive physiognomy of Jabez Hunsman, and making two or three rapid and severe applications to his pipe, he exclaimed vehemently—

"Then we're all done, by —!" and he thumped the table, as it were to add force to the asseveration.

"Two full pipes, and a pint of half-and-half," muttered his unconscious spouse; her errant fancy was evidently in the parlour of the Three Crowns.

"Here have I been at the expense of that child for these two years," continued Jabez, "and been always told that something hand-

some would be done one day; and here, at last, its all in the hands of a thievish lawyer, and we shall never have a shilling of it. But its all of a piece with my d—d good nature. I ought to have sent the child to the workus long ago." The perception of Jeffries was somewhat clouded, yet still his professional acuteness enabled him to espy a loop-hole in his friend's favour, to calm his indignation.

"Don't you be down-hearted about the matter, Jabez," hiccupped Jeffries; "for, though you are drunk, you've got a friend that will stand by you. I've seen many a good case made out of worse documents than your's. Don't you see, Jabez, that if there's any cross in this matter of the deed, as I suppose there will be, both parties must agree;—d—n that pipe."

"Here, take mine," said the generous, but impatient Jabez, thrusting his own into his friend's hand, in lieu of that which he had broken in expounding the law—"now go on."

"Let me see, brother Jabez," murmured Jeffries, with a drunken attempt at lawyer-like gravity, "let me see—what was the point?"

"The deed—both parties must be agreeable—don't you remember?"

"Yes, yes, I see," he continued, his professional instinct assisting his bewildered faculties—"that's clear—both parties must agree if they mean any cross; so, Jabez, your plan is to know nothing about this matter until we see what they intend to do; but stick close to your *friend*, Mrs. What-d'ye-call-her," and here the besotted limb of the law thrust his tongue into his cheek, and leered at his friend, in so facetious yet significant a spirit, that Jabez at once comprehended the insinuation.

"No, no, old fellow, you're wrong there," said he, his countenance growing a little brighter with the lawyer's consolatory observations; "its all a matter of business between me and her. I first made her acquaintance professionally. Davis gave me a writ to serve on her, as I was

a smartish-dressed chap; and I did it like a gentleman, and sent for a coach for her to come to Davis's house in the Square, till she could settle—which she wasn't long about. But I was mighty civil to her, and didn't get along with her into the coach, but mounted on the box, and made the man jump up behind, so that people would not have known but what she had got two livery servants."

"Nice boys for livery servants, I don't think," hiccupped out the clerk; "but I suppose she made it right with you?"

"We have been on and off ever since," continued Jabez. "I have been concerned in three or four little jobs for her, and I can't say I have any reason to find fault, except in the matter of the child. She got me to take it off her hands, promising something very handsome."

"You'll have it, Jabez, my boy—she will be here before many hours are over your head, or say Jack Jeffries knows nothing about his business. There goes that pipe again," he mut-

tered, with an expression stronger than is needful to repeat, and throwing the broken pieces under the grate, "they don't make 'em half so strong as they used. Well—now I'm off, Jabez—but I'm sorry to see you so drunk—very sorry—keep your eye up, old boy, and whatever you do, don't give your mind to drinking."

While Mr. Jeffries was thus uttering his drunken encouragement and advice, and preparing to make a vigorous sally from his position, some person from without made so energetic an appeal to the little brass bell-handle, which acted as the summons to Mr. Jabez Hunsman's establishment, that the family of that respectable man were all aroused to a consciousness of some impending event.

"Well I'm sure," exclaimed the drowsy Mrs. Hunsman, "they would never have sent that hundred of coals at this time of night!" at the same time endeavouring to adjust her disordered head-gear.

"It's more likely a job from Davis," said Mr. Hunsman thoughtfully.

"Then Davis's job is as drunk as beans," said Jeffries, holding himself up by the mantelpiece, and moving his head to and fro like a mandarin in a grocer's window.

Another peal reminded them that some one was intent on admittance—a fact which seemed hitherto to have escaped the comprehension of the party.

"Jabez, why don't you see who it is? If aunt should but be dead how comfortable we shall be!" urged Hunsman's smiling helpmate.

"Softly there—I'm coming," said Hunsman, lighting a candle to descend to their impatient visitor. "Put that child to bed, Bess," he added, seeing the child sitting shivering in the chair; "it looks as white as an angel on a tombstone." Whilst her husband descended to answer the door, his amiable wife took the child and the only candle, and quitted the room,

leaving Jeffries by the fire-light, balancing himself by the mantel-piece, as before described.

"Well!" hiccupped the remaining worthy, in a kind of soliloquy, "they are all drunk and gone to bed, and so I must find my way out. This is what they call treating one in a friendly way, I suppose—to break one's neck down stairs in the dark!" So saying, he left his position, and, staggering across the room, had just reached the door, when it was opened briskly from without, nearly to the discomfiture of our honest Jeffries, who, to save the consequences, vigorously possessed himself of the arm of his friend, and, in the effort, dislodged the candle from between the thumb and fingers of Hunsman, and it extinguished itself on the floor.

"Hollo, Jabez!—this comes of your being drunk, my boy," cried the clerk, with a hiccupping laugh.

"Hush, you fool," politely whispered his friend in his ear, "it's Mrs. Miltoune!"

"Oh—h!" ejaculated Jeffries, "that's it;" and reeling into the corner lately occupied by the child, he seated himself in a chair.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," said Jabez, "I'll light the candle in an instant—you had better not come in till I've got a light, or mayhap you may hurt yourself."

"Make what haste you can," said the lady from the passage, "for I've not many minutes to stay." Jabez applied the poker to the fire, and making a little blaze, thrust the candle into it as the quickest way of procuring a light, but after several vain attempts, began a fruitless search in his pockets for paper.

"What are you doing, Mr. Hunsman?" said the lady, impatiently, "remember I'm waiting in the cold."

"Shan't be one moment," cried Mr. Hunsman. "It is always the way," he muttered, "when one wants anything." Then groping over the table, having first seized the mutton-bone, and then upset the tea-cup, he found the

paper which had held the tobacco, and dropping upon his knees, and blowing with all his might, he succeeded at last in procuring ignition.

"Now, Mrs. Miltoune, will you please to walk in," said Hunsman, in his blandest tone; "I'm sorry to keep you waiting so long. Only my particular friend, Mr. Jeffries," observed the host, as he saw the lady look at the clerk suspiciously. "We've been talking over a matter of business this evening—a family matter." The clerk, holding firmly by the chair, immediately made an attempt at rising, to acknowledge the introduction; but finding the speculation hazardous, he prudently resumed his seat. Owing to the obscurity of the corner he had chosen, and a fit of coughing with which the lady was opportunely seized, his manœuvres were not observed, or at least not attributed to their right cause.

"Bless me! what a place," exclaimed Mrs. Miltoune, between the intervals of coughing;

"I am almost suffocated with this filthy tobacco."

"Shall I open the windows?" asked Hunsman.

"Anything, so that I can breathe," returned the lady. The windows were accordingly opened, and the fumes of the tobacco somewhat dispersed.

"If I had known you had been coming, ma'am—" began Hunsman, in an apologetical strain.

"You must please to excuse our friend Jabez, this evening, ma'am," interrupted Jeffries, indistinctly; "for I have been rather hard upon him; and as for the matter of the 'bacco, I have tried to bring him to segars these two years, on account of the ladies; but, I'm sorry to say, he has got some vulgar prejudices, and won't give up the clay. The lord preserve me from drunkenness!" And then, with a chuckling laugh, he threw his legs upon another chair, and reclined against the wall, as

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though preparing for a nap. The clerk said this in so broken and unintelligible a tone, that Mrs. Miltoune, to whom it was addressed, was not greatly enlightened by it; but Hunsman, pointing to the bottle, and then applying his forefinger significantly to his forehead, sufficiently accounted to her for the style of the address. She looked vaguely into the corner whence the voice proceeded, and then turning to the fire, by the side of which Jabez had obsequiously placed a chair, she sat down, uttering, as it were to herself—

"The filthy monster!"

"What can I do for you, ma'am," said Hunsman, fidgetting about, first poking the fire, then pushing the table, and then snuffing the candle; in every action betraying a nervous anxiety to bring about the business that brought Mrs. Miltoune to his domicile, at so late an hour.

"Why, Mr. Hunsman," said Mrs. Miltoune, "it is rather late to call; but I have

been in the city, and have taken your house on my way back. The fact is, I am rather anxious about the child."

"The dear thing is quite well," interrupted Jabez, casting a glance towards Jeffries, who, however, answered the admonitory hint only by a snore. "She has been in bed some hours; my wife is just now gone to look at her; and I will say—though mayhap I oughtn't to say it—that never was a child brought up better."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mrs. Miltoune; "but, indeed, I was quite sure of that, or I should have been with you long ago. I have been thinking it was time to put her to school; she must be nearly five years old."

"Why, yes, ma'am, she was just three years old this very Michaelmas Term two years since, when you first left her here; and you haven't set eyes upon her since; which, in course, I take to be your satisfaction of the treatment."

"I have had perfect reliance on you and

your wife," said Mrs. Miltoune; "and, indeed, my affairs have been in so deranged a state for some time, as you know, that I have not had the means of doing anything for Charlotte."

"In course, ma'am, in course," said Hunsman, hastily rising to shut the window, seeing Mrs. Miltoune wrapping her cloak around her. "Shall I offer you a little something warm? Yes, ma'am, as you say, I know you have had your troubles," adroitly continued the ex-turnkey, mixing, at the same time, a potent glass of the "extra strong," as though he would spare his visitor the trouble of replying to his hospitable proposition, otherwise than by that most expressive mode—silence. "You certainly have had your share, ma'am. Well, I little thought, when I got the coach for you that morning, that you would have put so many little things in my way. There was that six months' service with the French count—but come, ma'am, you're just out of the night-air;

taste this, it's very weak, it won't harm a babby." The lady, without hesitation, took the proffered tumbler, which Jabez had sufficient discrimination to sweeten from a canister in the cupboard, rather than apply to the mustard-pot on the table.

"Well, and how has the world used you for some time past, Hunsman?" inquired the lady, in a more familiar tone; "have you done any thing for Walgrave?"

"Oh, yes, Lord Walgrave is a very good friend of mine," returned Hunsman, knowingly; "I always settle everything for him, and he never grudges the fees. But I hope times have mended with you, ma'am."

"In a trifling degree I may say they *are* improved," returned the lady, indifferently; "and I hope now to afford an education for the child—which, indeed, is the business that I have with you."

"Why, ma'am, as to the schooling," said Jabez, "she has been as well edicated as

any child of her age. I have been paying for her, at Miss Snodgrass's, at 56, over the way, who teaches everything for ninepence a week. She has cost me a good deal, ma'am, I assure you. But, as I said to my wife—what's the use of minding a trifle out of pocket? we shall have it back again some day; and, if not, what's the odds? says I; but I knew you was anxious about the child, as, indeed, your coming here to-night proves. And here's wishing your very good health, ma'am, and better times to us all." And having replenished the glass which his loving spouse had drained before she courted repose, he applied himself vigorously to its contents.

"Thank you, Hunsman. Why, the feelings of a mother are not to be controlled," said Mrs. Miltoune, in reply to his former remark; "and, therefore, as I observed, I am anxious that the child should benefit by any alteration in my circumstances, however slight; in which case, of course, your little demand shall be

liquidated. You can bring the child to me, to-morrow ;—no, I had better call for her ; for, I must tell you, I have a lawyer to settle with before my affairs mend."

"It isn't Robinson, is it?" asked Hunsman, indifferently.

"What made you think of him?" said Mrs. Miltoune, surprised.

"I don't know, except that I had a little business with him the other day," answered Jabez. "I went to settle a matter with him for a gentleman, and I had a hard matter to do it."

"Well, I believe, I need not make it a secret," returned Mrs. Miltoune; "it is with him that I have business."

"Umph! that's curious, now, that I should have guessed it," said Jabez.

"It is rather singular," returned Mrs. Miltoune.

"Well, then, ma'am," said Jabez, "seeing that he's a d—d rogue, I think it would

be quite as well that I should go along with you."

"Our business will be strictly private," remarked Mrs. Miltoune.

"Oh, yes, in course; but I mean, to wait for you," suggested Jabez; "you don't know but you may want me."

"True, it is possible; at all events it will do no harm," said Mrs. Miltoune, as though to herself. "Very well, Hunsman, be ready with the child by two o'clock to-morrow, and I will call for you."

"But, ma'am," suggested Jabez—"as to the child's clothes? They are good enough for her here; but, mayhap, you may like her to have a few things of a bettermost sort to go with you in."

"True, Hunsman," said the lady; "I had forgotten that; I will bring a bonnet and dress for her to-morrow." Then rising, with Hunsman's assistance she descended the narrow staircase without accident, and wishing him

good night, left the worthy and useful Jabez to his own sagacious reflections upon her unexpected visit. Upon his return to his apartment, he found his friend Jeffries holding himself upright by the assistance of the mantelpiece, in the same position as when he left him to open the door to Mrs. Miltoune; but he now held in his hand the bottle, out of which he had apparently helped himself without the adventitious aid of a tumbler.

"Why, Jeffries, I thought you was asleep," said Jabez.

"Catch a lawyer asleep that knows his business," said Jeffries, with a drunken leer; "because you're drunk, you think I am. Come with her to the office to-morrow, and we will see the case through. They must do the thing handsome by you—never fear, although you have made remarks against the honourable profession of the law. But, never mind, you're drunk, Jabez, and I forgive you," and taking his friend's arm, he made his way

to the street-door, and Jabez sought his matrimonial blankets,—whither his wife had some time betaken herself, and was giving audible proof of the soporific quality of the "extra strong."

CHAPTER III.

"Nature herself flew back when they were born,
And cried, the work's not mine!"

"My business in this state
Made me a looker on."

THE attorney who has been previously introduced by the name of Robinson, occupied a first floor in Jermyn-street, as chambers, in the front room of which some half-dozen clerks were variously employed, in the respective duties of the profession. Mr. Jeffries, better known as Jack Jeffries, occupied the back room; and, in the third, or innermost chamber, Mr. Robinson himself received those whose business was "private and confidential."

On the day following the convivial meeting described in the last chapter, Mr. Jeffries was seated at his writing-table, which was nearly hidden with small bundles of papers, tied with red tape. Before him were spread many open folios, which, with pen in hand, he might have been supposed to be revising or correcting, but that his eyes were obviously directed towards a small drawer immediately on his right hand, in which lay, concealed from the curious, the embrowned, and well-thumbed relics of a romance,—the perusal of which, at the moderate outlay of one penny *per diem*, served to refresh his faculties when wearied with the severe and monotonous duties of his calling. Whilst thus pleasantly occupied with the exploits of witches and banditti—the lawyers and conveyancers of those days—a slight tap at the door, dispelling the visions of careering besoms and blood-stained vests, recalled him to the base realities of existence. In an instant the drawer with its precious contents glided into its mahogany re-

cess, and the courteous Jeffries arose, having first mechanically dipped his pen into the ink, and with many a smirk and bow introduced Mrs. Miltoune, who was followed by his confederate, Hunsman, leading the little girl.

The visit was already expected by Mr. Robinson; it required, therefore, but a short space to announce Mrs. Miltoune's name, and usher her into the presence of that respectable practitioner.

"Now, Hunsman, we must look to business," said Jeffries; "what are we to do with the child? Oh, I have it"—and ringing the bell smartly, a respectable-looking woman appeared, who lived in the kitchens, and acted as housekeeper.

"Take this young lady under your care, Mrs. James, for a short time," said Jeffries, "and amuse her as well as you can while her mamma is engaged." Having thus disposed of the child, the two confederates looked at each other for a moment, with a comical ex-

pression of expectation, as though each expected the other to break the ice.

"Come," said Jeffries, "sitting still won't do much towards making us the richer. I intend you to make a good morning's work; but, if we don't watch the proceedings yonder," pointing to his master's room, "we shall not know what they do with the plunder."

"But how are we to watch them," asked Hunsman innocently.

"Why, old fellow, you shall see," said Jeffries; "but, remember, this is your business, and if you ever mention a word of—" Here he was anticipated by his companion declaring most energetically his readiness to consign himself to the enemy of souls if ever he breathed a syllable of the matter. Under this assurance Jeffries skipped across the room, and bolted the door; thus making sure that no sudden interruption from that quarter should disturb their operation. Jeffries then approached the entrance to his master's room on tip-toe,

and cautiously opening the green door, applied his eye to an ingenious perforation, which had been effected by means of a very fine gimblet. The aperture was of course very minute in the interior, and was effectually protected from observation by the deep shadow of a projecting bookcase. It was by this easy communication that the confidential clerk saved his master the trouble of making him acquainted with the minute particulars of his supposed secret interviews with clients, the nature of whose business was intended to be a mystery to all save the principal himself. And it was the ability with which he transacted certain portions of the business of this secret service, knowing as he did the whole bearing of it, which obtained for him with his master the reputation of a sharp-witted, clever fellow.

By the means of the railroad just indicated, the right eye of Jeffries travelled to the position of the parties now closeted together, and

having taken an ample survey, he stepped back, and closed the green door.

"Now, old boy, they are just beginning business," said he; "the governor has unlocked the case and taken out the deed. I must stand between the two doors closed, that I may not lose a word of what passes; and if any one knocks at the outward door, open the green door cautiously, and let me know." Hunsman promised to observe the directions, and the confidential clerk took his station, and heard as follows:—

"My dear madam," said Mr. Robinson, in a bland and courteous tone, "none can appreciate your maternal anxiety better than myself; indeed, as I said before, no one can be so proper a guardian to the dear infant as yourself."

"You have a very proper feeling, Mr. Robinson," said Mrs. Miltoune; "I must confess that I felt more hurt than I can express, at the singular want of confidence poor dear

Lord Charleston evinced towards me in his latter moments."

"It was singular, indeed," observed Mr. Robinson.

"Particularly when formerly there were but few acts of his life that he did not consult me upon; such was his reliance upon my judgment."

"Disease, my dear madam, had made our poor dear friend irritable," mildly remarked the man of law; "and, at such a moment, we must rather commiserate than judge. We are, the best of us even, but poor weak creatures, and it is our duty to visit leniently the faults of others, seeing that none of us are perfect." And having uttered this truly Christian remark, the good gentleman gravely shook his head, and applied his white cambric pocket-handkerchief to his nose.

"Oh, I never thought about it after the first few minutes," said Mrs. Miltoune; "only you must allow, Mr. Robinson, much as I

may respect you," (here Mr. Robinson bowed to the very table,) "that it is extremely mortifying to be obliged to ask you for every sum of money that I may have occasion for, or to consult upon every change of the child's schooling."

"Why, madam, fortunately there is no occasion that you should be under all this unpleasantness," observed Mr. Robinson.

"It is very kind of you, to say so," remarked Mrs. Miltoune; "and, perhaps, your politeness would dispense with such constant communication upon trifles; but I am not the less dependent upon you."

"As I said before, Mrs. Miltoune," said Mr. Robinson, "I think every mother should be the guardian of her child; and, although I could not argue the matter with our poor dear friend upon his deathbed, yet, as it fortunately happens that we are the only parties to the business, we can perhaps make such arrangements as may be convenient to both."

"I am sure, Mr. Robinson, I did not expect to find you so kind—so very kind," said Mrs. Miltoune, her countenance lighting up with surprise and pleasure, as she expected all the advantage of the bequest, with the disagreeable clog of trusteeship relinquished; and an idea hastily crossed her mind, touching the propriety of presenting this most liberal-minded attorney with a very handsome present. "I do assure you, you will find me most grateful," she added; "and, after all, it was very hard of poor dear Charleston to place me in such a position; however, I am under the greatest obligations to you."

"No, no, my dear madam," interrupted the attorney, "this is an affair in which we may be of mutual service to each other."

"If you can point out any way in which I can render you any service, in return for your kindness," said Mrs. Miltoune, "I am sure I shall be delighted."

"I will tell you, Mrs. Miltoune, how we

may arrange this little business," said Mr. Robinson, slowly, at the same time untying a small bundle of papers, and arranging them before him. "You see, madam, our late friend has left you the sum of £3000."

"Exactly."

"And which he has clogged with the condition of its being to be delivered to you from time to time, or to be invested for your use."

"Quite absurd, Mr. Robinson," observed Mrs. Miltoune, hastily; "what would be the use of such a pittance to me as the interest of £3000. The money itself would be valuable to me, for certain purposes which I wish to carry into effect. But you are a man of the world, Mr. Robinson, and a man of sense, and can perfectly comprehend my position."

"Perfectly, madam, perfectly, and it is for that reason that I propose to do away with these restrictions, and give you the money at once," said Mr. Robinson. in the kindest possible tone, at the same time taking from a

pocket-book the little silk note-case which was delivered to him by the earl.

"Oh, Mr. Robinson!" exclaimed the lady, a flush of delight overspreading her countenance, "how shall I ever repay you this disinterested kindness?"

"A mere trifle, madam, a mere trifle; we must all assist each other; it is a Christian duty," said the attorney, with great humility of manner. "But, let me see, the money is right, of course; yes, one thousand—two thousand—three thousand," and he spread the notes temptingly before her; "all new from the Bank of England, and signed by Gibbins, a most worthy man, and a client of mine. Yes; three thousand pounds in Bank of England notes,—a large sum of money, indeed!" The lady's eyes were rivetted upon the money, and her hands open to receive it.

"Oh, you kind, good creature!" she exclaimed, enthusiastically, as the attorney slowly gathered up the notes, and returned them to

their former position, doubtless to hand over to her. "And, with respect to the £200 per annum belonging to little Charlotte, of course—"

"Ah, madam!" interrupted Mr. Robinson, in a deprecatory tone, and placing his two fingers upon the note-case, which he held in the palm of his other hand,—"now I must beg your indulgence—now you have arrived at the weak point—upon this I must crave your patience." Mrs. Miltoune's colour slightly changed at this ominous preface, but she awaited his continuation in silence, whilst he unfolded a deed. At this moment, Jeffries, who had been listening attentively to the preceding, felt his coat pulled, and supposing Hunsman had heard a knock at the office-door, gently stepped from his concealment.

"Well Jack," said his companion, most impatiently, "you have been a precious time—what is it all about?"

"Is that all you called me out for?"

"In course."

"Then keep your fingers to yourself, you gallows fool," was the urbane reply of the enraged clerk; "and if you interrupt me again, I'll put my fist in your face." Hunsman looked rather foolish at this friendly reproof, and the angry Jeffries noiselessly regained his position.

"Yes, madam," said the attorney, who had covered the table with parchments; "this, as I said, is my weak point; and I should be sorry to confess so much to any other than yourself."

"I do not understand you, sir," said Mrs. Miltoune, anxiously expecting the lingering explanation.

"I am about to explain.—The Earl left a small estate to your little daughter, known as Charlotte Amelia Russell."

"Yes, sir; a small estate in Berkshire, as I understand, worth about 200*l.* per annum," said Mrs. Miltoune.

"Precisely.—Well, madam, I fear that by an unfortunate error—a most unhappy blunder—I have entirely invalidated this deed."

"How, sir? good God!" exclaimed Mrs. Miltoune, turning pale: "You do not surely mean to say that the deed is not good—that the property is lost?"

"It is, unhappily, too true," replied Mr. Robinson, shaking his head, and evincing the utmost concern. "But, my good madam, pray be patient," he said, observing a storm gathering upon the lady's brow, "I will explain."

"Explain, sir! What is the use of your explanation, if you have lost my child's property? I'll have justice, sir. If the child has suffered by your professional neglect, you must make it good. I know an attorney who was forced to make good a thousand pounds for his blunder; and you shall do the same."

"Very well, madam," returned Mr. Robinson; "then in the mean time I will keep possession of the three thousand pounds, to defend the action you may bring against me;" at the same time replacing the silk note-case and its

contents in his pocket-book, and putting it into his pocket.

"I'll dare you to it!" exclaimed the lady, whose face became crimson as she watched this process; and little accustomed to control her temper, she clenched her hand in a threatening attitude at the attorney. "If you dare play your tricks upon me, Mr. Robinson, I'll expose you, sir: the world shall know you for a rascal."

"Excuse me, madam," interposed Mr. Robinson, very placidly; "I cannot listen to such language. By my integrity I have risen to my present position, and I must not have such words uttered here. If you will hear me, I will explain. I have no wish to keep the three thousand pounds, unless you force me. I beg you will be patient."

"Well, sir, I am patient," exclaimed Mrs. Miltoune; her face still flushed, and her bosom heaving with choler.

"Well, madam, you must know that on the

evening of our poor friend's death"—and here the cambric handkerchief was applied to his face *en passant*,—"he would insist that I should draw the deeds myself, by way of security and secrecy. Well, madam, I had the precaution to take two stamps with me; and what with the poor Earl's conversation, and the excitement of my own feelings, I spoiled one stamp, by leaving out the child's name: in fact I conveyed the estate to myself instead of the child. However, I immediately rectified it upon the other stamp; but, by the most extraordinary mistake that ever was committed, the signatures were all affixed to the deed I intended to have cancelled. Indeed, I was so lost at the time by the approaching dissolution of my poor dear friend and benefactor, that I scarcely knew what I did. However, there are the two deeds, madam, you can peruse them."

"O, I don't understand the jargon," cried Mrs. Miltoune; "it is the most extravagant tale

I ever heard. You may think, Mr. Robinson, that because you have got a woman and a child to deal with, you can do what you please, but—"

"Oh! the three thousand pounds?—you were about to inquire—" interposed the attorney.

"Well, sir, and what do you propose to do?" asked Mrs. Miltoune, forcing a composure she did not feel—her common sense pointing out that she was in the position of the 'crane with its head in the wolf's jaws.'

"Why, madam, simply to make the best of a most unhappy mistake, which I shall regret as long as I live," said Robinson, shaking his head, and applying his handkerchief, as usual—"it could never have been of any benefit to you, as the proceeds would have been invested for the child's use, saving the bare expenses of her bringing up. Now, madam, if you will consent to pass over this little professional blunder of mine, I will not only give over to

you the three thousand pounds, but I will add the further sum of five hundred pounds at the end of three years, from the proceeds of the estate; which will be the utmost amount I shall receive. Profit to myself, God knows, is not my object in this unhappy business;" and so saying, he again took out the pocket-book.

The sight of this inviting object caused Mrs. Miltoune to reflect, that had the deed been legal, and the estate conveyed to the child, as the attorney said, it would have been but of small advantage to *her* personally; whereas the ready money promised would be of immediate benefit. If the truth must be spoken, the interest she took in the welfare of her child, apart from her own separate advantage, was but small. The fact of having left her so long in the hands of strangers, argued but little maternal affection; and little even of its outward sign was the poor child ever destined to know, unless dictated by caprice, or vanity, or interest. In

short, a very little further consideration induced Mrs. Miltoune to listen to Mr. Robinson's apologies for his mistake, with more complacency than she could at first command.

"Indeed, my dear madam," blandly suggested Mr. Robinson, "had the deed even been as I could have wished it, the poor dear infant would have been placed in a very trying position. She would have been independent of her mother; which is generally injurious to young persons, and renders them impatient of parental control."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Miltoune, after having thought of the most advantageous terms for herself, "you propose to give me £3500, if I pass over the claim to the estate?"

"Precisely so; inasmuch as the deed standing as it does by my unhappy blunder, the estate never could be available to the child, and must either be given up to the heir, or remain with me. In the latter case, I may have it in my power to befriend the dear infant on

some future occasion; whereas, in the former contingency, none of us can be gainers."

"Come, Mr. Robinson, you will see I am not very hard to deal with:—give me the money, and you may do what you like with the estate," said Mrs. Miltoune, having succeeded in quieting her maternal scruples, "for I see that I shall be none the richer for it:—or is there any other *mistake* of your's to arrange?" she added, sarcastically, seeing that he hesitated.

"None whatever, madam," returned the man of law; "I shall only require a slight memorandum by way of security, and the money is your's."

"Security! what for?" inquired the lady, relapsing again into anger.

"Do not disturb yourself, madam," soothingly ejaculated Mr. Robinson; "a mere form —that's all."

"But what is it *for*, sir? What am I to give security *for?*" reiterated Mrs. Miltoune, her face resuming its former glow—"you take

away the child's property, and then want security."

"Excuse me, madam, if you will listen for one moment, you will find I am quite right."

"Well, sir, I shall be glad to hear," said the lady, beating a tattoo upon the floor with her feet.

"My reputation, madam, is dearer to me than profit," said the attorney.

Mrs. Miltoune coughed.

"Yes, madam," continued Mr. Robinson, "and the paltry value of the estate we have been talking of, is nothing to me, compared with my honour. God bless me! what noise was that?"

At that moment an indescribable sound was heard, resembling something between a laugh and a sneeze, which certainly did not proceed from either of the parties present. Mr. Robinson looked round the room suspiciously, then at Mrs. Miltoune, and then under the table, but without any satisfactory result.

"Very extraordinary!" muttered the attorney, and rising, he opened the doors, and cast a glance around the clerk's office. Jeffries was busy at his desk, and Hunsman was reading the newspaper by the fire. Everything seemed as usual, and Mr. Robinson returned to his seat. The fact was, that our friend Jeffries had gradually become so interested in the conversation proceeding between the attorney and Mrs. Miltoune, that when his master spoke so seriously of his "honour," he thought the idea so exquisitely facetious, that, forgetting for a moment his critical position, he could not control a burst of smothered merriment. Luckily, however, he had plenty of time to withdraw himself from the consequence of his imprudence; though he was not a little alarmed lest his secret should be suspected by his wary master.

"Well, madam," resumed the attorney, having re-adjusted himself, "I was about to explain to you, touching the little memorandum

I required. It is simply thus—that valuing my professional reputation highly—very highly —I would not have it known that I had committed so great a blunder as this unfortunate deed bears witness to. You see, madam, I am candid with you. Now, madam, lest you, in some moment of forgetfulness should unhappily mention this circumstance, which ill-natured people might speak of to my disadvantage, I must place you under a slight penalty, by requesting you to give me a little document, by which I may re-claim this money which I shall presently hand over to you, if anything should transpire of what has passed solely between ourselves."

"You need not doubt me, Mr. Robinson; I have no interest in mentioning the subject again. I shall be satisfied with the money, which is of more consequence to me now than anything in expectancy. Make out the document you speak of, and let me be gone." She spoke those words in a sharp, abrupt tone

which showed that she was but half satisfied with the proceedings, but determined to have the money upon any terms. Mr. Robinson again took out the pocket-book, and from thence the silk note-case, and selecting from the papers a stamped deed, already filled up, which was, in fact, nothing less than a bond for the money, he tendered it for Mrs. Miltoune's signature. She put her name to it without further hesitation, and he then handed her over the three notes of £1000 each.

"Well, Jeffries," said Hunsman, pressing close to his friend, who had emerged from his hiding-place, "have they settled it?"

"Oh, yes, it's all arranged," said Jeffries, deliberately stirring the fire; "they have shared it between them, as I told you."

"And which has got the best of it?" asked the other, rubbing his hands, with an impatient gesture.

The clerk stared at him for a moment with astonishment, at the simplicity of the question

—"Why," he said, "the governor's got it all in his own hands, in course. I can't help respecting his talents, though it may be a little hard upon the young 'un;" but seeing Hunsman look black at this intelligence, he added, "but you need not be down about the matter; she has got enough to square accounts handsomely with you; and mind, you mustn't split with her for a trifle, as she can put many things in your way; therefore, be satisfied with a hundred pound note for giving up the child. I'll tell you all about the case at the Three Crowns, to-night."

Hunsman made a sign that he understood his friend's hint. "And so I suppose," said he, "the babby hasn't got the vally of a cheeseparing?"

"That's none of our business," returned the other; "at least, not now. But we had better have her up, for they will be out in another minute," and ringing the bell, the housekeeper brought the child back to the office.

A few minutes afterwards Mrs. Miltoune made her appearance, accompanied by the attorney, who bowed her out with all imaginable courtesy. Her manner was short and abrupt, as though not particularly pleased with the result of her interview. She scarcely took any leave of the polite Mr. Robinson, but signing to Hunsman to follow with the child, she left the office.

The man of law retired to his own chamber, and our friend Jeffries, after the lapse of a few minutes, took the liberty to reconnoitre his master's movements. Mr. Robinson was busily engaged in cutting into small shreds one of two deeds; after which he looked over the other, and folding it with the bond just signed by Mrs. Miltoune, carefully deposited them in his strong box. He then threw himself back in his easy arm-chair, and looking cautiously round his office, lifted his large green spectacles, and remained for a few minutes in that quiet contemplative state which one might suppose a

good man would indulge in whilst reflecting on the happy results likely to arise from some late act of benevolence.

It will scarcely be necessary to pursue this portion of our tale further than to say, that little Charlotte, as she was then called, went to school, and her respectable friend, Mr. Hunsman, received from Mrs. Miltoune the sum of £100; though not without some remonstrance on the exorbitance of the claim, for his parental superintendance of the young lady during the two years she had shared the comforts of his hospitable establishment. The sampler, mentioned in the second chapter, so inauspiciously commenced by their young inmate, was finished about twelve months after, by the united exertions of Mr. Hunsman's smiling helpmate, and a charity child, whom that exemplary woman had engaged to assist her in her household duties, at the rate of sixpence a week and her "meals." This rare example of female ingenuity was duly framed

and glazed, and presented by Mrs. Hunsman to "old Johnson," as he was familiarly termed by his more intimate associates, as a testimony of her grateful recollection of his many kindnesses, and much forbearance, during the years she reigned Queen of the tap and parlour at his hospitable establishment. Those who are particularly curious in such matters may yet inspect it, over the mantel-piece in the parlour of the Three Crowns in Red Lion-street.

CHAPTER IV.

" Where is the world of *ten* years past?—'Twas there—
I look for it—'tis gone!"

" Thou thread, thou thimble,
Thou yard, three-quarters, half-yard, quarter, nail,
Thou flea, thou nit, thou winter-cricket, thou:—
Braved in my own house by a skein of thread!"

THE best apartments of one of the very best houses in St. James's-place were occupied by Lord Walgrave, the eldest son of a peer, and a colonel in the third regiment of guards. He was a handsome man, though his features might be thought somewhat too effeminate; his age about thirty years, and his height barely reaching what is called the " middle size." His manners were those of one to whom the best society is familiar: he was courteous to all, and as-

sumed no superiority but that with which nature and education had gifted him. Nevertheless, with a mind highly cultivated, and superior natural talents, his uncontrolled habits of dissipation, and his reckless expenditure, added to fondness for play, were gradually undermining both health and fortune; and his generous and honourable feelings were fast giving way, before the means he was compelled to adopt, to extricate himself from difficulties brought on by debasing pursuits. Such was the nobleman we are about to introduce to the reader. It was past mid-day, and Lord Walgrave was reclining listlessly in his large arm-chair, with the untouched breakfast-things upon the table. At his elbow were an empty soda-water bottle, and a liqueur bottle of brandy. His languid eye and pallid countenance betrayed the nature of his entertainment of the preceding evening.

"Jackson, my good fellow," said his lordship, as his valet entered the apartment, "you

have undertaken a situation for which you are totally unfit."

"My lord, I am very sorry—"

"I mean to say that the duties of my situation are peculiar, and require a tact which you do not possess—that of civilly dismissing persons whose presence is disagreeable."

"My lord, during the time I have been in your lordship's service I have endeavoured—"

"Ah, you have endeavoured! There it is, my good fellow; don't you see that your talent does not lie that way? There was your predecessor, Roberts, whom I was foolish enough to part with to oblige a young friend—he was the pearl of servants: during the whole time he was with me, the voice of a creditor was never heard; the cries of the industrious never reached me then; but now!—" and he lifted his hands with a most rueful expression of disappointment and vexation.

"My lord, if you mean this morning," said the valet, "I really believe there has been a

conspiracy; no less than fifteen people have been here for their accounts, and were quite clamorous."

"Now I will tell you, Jackson, what I should have done in your place," said his lordship; "I should have tied an old glove round the knocker, and declared my master to be dangerously ill; for really, to be roused in the middle of the night by the clamour of creditors, is truly barbarous—fatal alike to health and comfort."

"You may rely on it, my lord, that I will manage better another time," replied the valet; "but I am almost ashamed to tell your lordship that one man remains below in the hall, and declares he will wait there till your lordship goes out."

"Oh, indeed! and who may he be?

"Mr. Schneider, my lord, your German tailor."

"Ah! then in that case, show him up, Jackson; I will answer him myself," said

Lord Walgrave; "but stay, place my fencing foils upon the table, a couple of sabres, and my case of pistols. There, now bring me my flannel jacket and pumps: there, now let the tailor come up."

Whilst Jackson went to introduce the tailor, Lord Walgrave divested himself of his flowered silk dressing-gown and furred slippers, and putting on the jacket and pumps, took one of the foils, and commenced practising, by "lunging" against the wall of his apartment. Presently Mr. Schneider made his appearance. He was a little, sallow old man, and, as he entered the room, appeared as though he had almost repented of his temerity, when he found himself in the presence of the nobleman upon whom he had thus thrust himself. The determination he had shown to the valet, gave way to his natural obsequiousness of deportment, and he stood within a foot of the door, fidgetting with his hat, whilst Lord Walgrave continued his practice, taking no more notice of him than if he had been a ninepin.

"One—two—ha! one—two—good!" and after some little time pursuing this occupation, his lordship threw himself into a chair to recover his breath, and then cast his eyes, as though accidentally, upon the tailor.

"Ah, Schneider, is that you? what can I do for you, eh? do you want a frank? you see I'm a little busy."

"Mi lord, I take de liberty to call—"

"Ah, I see;—no, I do not want anything, that I know of, Schneider, but I may call some day this week," and his lordship resumed his foils: "one—two—ha! capital. You may go, Schneider."

"Mi lord, I take de liberty—" again commenced the tailor, most humbly.

"Ah, by the way, Schneider," interrupted his lordship, "stay a moment—you may do me a service—a lucky thought."

"Any ting, mi lord, dat I can do, I am sure—"

"You see, I've an affair upon my hands,

Schneider ;—a few words with a French nobleman last night, and he insists upon going out with swords. Now, as I am a little out of practice, you are come in the very nick of time, to give me a few hints. Jackson, hand Mr. Schneider a foil."

"Oh ! mi lord," cried the German, aghast at the proposition, "I never tush a sword in all my life ; I am ver sorry—"

"What ! a German, and not know how to handle the small-sword? did ever man hear such nonsense? Jackson, hand a foil immediately—I'll take no excuse."

"Mi lord ! mi lord ! I do assure your lordship—" commenced the German, in vain endeavouring to excuse himself, after Jackson had unceremoniously thrust the foil into his hand.

"Now, don't be afraid, the foils are well buttoned."

'Ah, mi lord ! I do assure your lordship—" again began the tailor, with a most pitiful ex-

pression of countenance, and holding the weapon as if it were a yard measure.

"Nonsense, Schneider, you are too modest. Now, stand to your guard; *carte* over the arm; one, two! there you have it!"

"Oh! mi lord! ah! I never tush—ha!"

"One—two—ha!"

"Ha! mine Got! ha!"

"One—two—there, button-hole—hit again, by Jupiter!"

"Oh! der divel! mi lord! mi lord!" cried the German, covering his stomach with his left hand.

"One—two! fifth rib! had you again—capital hit that!"

"Ah, mi lord—*grace!* oh! pray, mi lord—"

"One—two! *tierce* under the arm; there you caught it; well buttoned foils, or you had been a slaughtered tailor!"

"Ah! *donder en blitzen!* oh! mi lord! mine poor side! ah!"

"One—two! touched your neck, egad! take

care of your eyes, Schneider; a friend of mine lost his sight."

"Ah! mine Got! mi lord! ten tousand divels!" and, in an agony of fear, he threw away the foil, and clasping his hands together, cried out most piteously for mercy.

"Why, Schneider, my good friend, how's this?" said Lord Walgrave, affecting the greatest surprise, though scarcely able to refrain from laughing, whilst Jackson was stuffing a handkerchief in his mouth, to prevent an unseemly exhibition of mirth. "Ah, I see, you conceal your skill—you fear to hurt me."

"No, no, mi lord; I assure you, I never tush de small sword in all mine life; I beg you excuse me."

"Ah, what a mistake I have been making all this time! I recollect now," said his lordship, "you Germans are all so fond of the sabre. Hand Mr. Schneider a sabre, Jackson."

"Ah, mi lord! mi lord!" screamed the

German, alarmed beyond measure at this new proposition.

"Rather dangerous practice, though," continued the nobleman, without heeding the deprecatory gestures of the tailor. "Just pass your fingers across the edge of that blade Schneider—it will do you good."

"Ah, I pray you, my lord! I never tush—"

"It belonged to a friend of mine, at Waterloo; it cut through a Frenchman's body at one sheer! The marks of the blood still remain."

"Ha! mine Got! Mi lord, I do assure your lordship, I never tush—"

"Now, Schneider, stand to your guard. I'll endeavour not to wound you—at least not severely."

"Ah, mi lord, impossible! you have broke all my ribs!" and no entreaty could prevail upon the tailor to touch the sabre. He resolutely thrust his hands in his pockets, re-

fused the smallest trial of skill, and looked most earnestly around.

"What are you looking for, Schneider?" asked Lord Walgrave, making his weapon whistle through the air, with the dexterity of a master; "is it the sabre you want?"

"No, no, mi lord," cried the terrified tradesman, "I look for my hat;" and having secured the stray *chapeau*, which had been kicked into a corner, he made a rush at the door.

"But, Schneider, stay a moment," cried Lord Walgrave, "your account is not arranged, you know."

"Anoder time, my lord—anoder time," cried the German, who was already in the passage.

"I'm ready now, Schneider," said Lord Walgrave, calling after him—"one, two—a good hit; you had better come back, Schneider."

"No, mi lord, I tank you; anoder time," cried the German, who was half way down stairs—"anoder time, mi lord, when you have no French gentilman to kill—no littel affair on

your hand!" and, pursued by the everlasting "One—two!" the tailor made but three steps into the street, nor did he fancy himself in security till he heard the street-door close after him.

"Well, Jackson, is the tailor dispatched?" said Lord Walgrave, as he threw himself into his chair, and indulged in an unconstrained fit of mirth, which was echoed, though more moderately, by his valet.

"Yes, my lord, he ran from the door as though the house was on fire," replied the valet.

"When Schneider calls again, Jackson," said his master, "remember that I have another French 'gentilman' to kill—another 'littel' affair."

"Yes, my lord, I'll take care to remind him," said the valet; "but I forgot to mention, my lord, that a gentleman has called twice this morning, but begged you might, on no account, be disturbed;" and he handed his

master a card, which, having glanced at, his lordship said—

"Ah, my old friend, Hopwood! let him come up, by all means, if he calls again. I've owed him £100 these two years, and he never hints at payment. I think the sight of me is an equivalent. Let the good man pay himself by all means—it is but fair, if he is satisfied with such convenient coin. Egad! if all creditors were as praiseworthy, I would hold a levee every morning, and, in about a month, I should not owe a sixpence. By the way, Jackson, did that fellow who left the note the other day, Hunsman, say anything to you of his mistress?"

"Nothing whatever, my lord," replied the valet.

"Good! you may go."

At this moment a gentle knock was heard at the street-door, as if the individual who had taken the knocker in his hand had let it slip through his fingers in fear.

"I think that is the gentleman's knock, my lord," observed the valet.

"Tell him I shall be happy to see him," said his lordship; "and give me some breakfast, for the exercise with the tailor has given me an appetite."

CHAPTER V.

"You are meek, and humble-mouth'd;
You sign your place and calling, in full seeming,
With meekness and humility; but your heart
Is cramm'd with arrogancy, spleen, and pride."

"Brutus is an honourable man,
So are they all, all honourable men."

JACKSON lost no time in introducing Mr Hopwood. He was a man of about sixty years of age, short of stature, and his sleek and rotund appearance argued his familiarity with the good things of this world. He had the good-humoured, though self-satisfied expression of countenance peculiar to the successful tradesman; although, on the present occasion, his downcast eyes, and half-inclined form, evinced a deep respect for the presence he was in—it might, indeed, be called humility.

"Ah, my dear Hopwood, is that you?" exclaimed Lord Walgrave, smiling a welcome to his visitor; "I am delighted to see you, my respectable friend. How is it that you so seldom call? you know I am always at home to you." Mr. Hopwood hardly knew where he was, so much was he bewildered at the young nobleman's condescending expressions of regard towards him. His only refuge seemed to be in bowing; he bowed most humbly to Lord Walgrave; he bowed to Jackson, who hastened to take his hat; he bowed all round, and slided rather than stepped upon the carpet, as if he thought the material too aristocratic to be pressed rudely by plebeian foot; all the time uttering by syllables—

"Oh! my lord—your condescension—I'm sure—for my part—"

"Sit down, Hopwood, sit down, my good friend," said his lordship; "Jackson, reach my friend, Mr. Hopwood, a chair."

"Oh, my lord, I'm sure—"

"Do you know, Hopwood, I was just then speaking of you," continued the nobleman; "Jackson informed me that you had called here twice this morning, and I was giving it him soundly for allowing you to go away; he ought to have called me."

"Oh, my lord, I would not on any account that Mr. Jackson should have disturbed you on my account," said the delighted Hopwood; "I should never have forgiven myself."

"Servants ought to have discrimination, my dear Hopwood," said Lord Walgrave; "when a real friend does me the favour to call upon me—one like yourself, Hopwood, whom I see so seldom—I have no notion of his being sent away like a common acquaintance."

"Indeed, my lord, it was my own fault," murmured the enraptured Hopwood, upon whom the accents of the nobleman fell as sweet as honey-dew; "I was much too soon—your lordship must not blame Mr. Jackson; but really, living constantly in the country, causes

one entirely to forget the hours and habits of town."

"What, living in the country, eh?" said the nobleman, with feigned interest; "retired from business, I suppose?"

"Yes, my lord," answered his visitor; "four years, come next Christmas, that I have left business."

"And in what pleasant place have you fixed your abode?" inquired Lord Walgrave.

"At Egham, my lord, where I have a very pleasant little box, I assure your lordship," replied Mr. Hopwood, becoming gradually more at home, from the encouraging attentions of his noble host.

"Egham! Egham! let me see—do I know Egham, Jackson?" said his lordship, as if endeavouring to recal it to his mind.

"It is close by Englefield Green, my lord," answered the valet.

"It almost joins it, Mr. Jackson," remarked Mr. Hopwood.

"Exactly so, sir," answered the valet, respectfully.

"Oh, indeed; I have been at Englefield Green two or three times," said Lord Walgrave, "but it was always at night, and I did not remember the locality."

"My lord, it lies in the direction of Hyde Park Corner—Kensington—Hammersmith—Turnham Green—Brentford—"

"Ha! ha! ha! thank you, I remember it now," answered his lordship, laughing; "you are as good as a map, Hopwood. A lady of my acquaintance lived there, in the house which was formerly my friend, Lord Beverley's;—Mrs. Miltoune—do you know her?"

"Only by name, my lord," answered Mr. Hopwood; "but her daughter by a former marriage, Miss Agnes Graham, is frequently at my house."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, my lord. She was a great friend of my daughter's, at school; she seems a pleasant,

unassuming young lady, and of course I am always glad to see her."

"Truly, truly; but talking with you, Hopwood, I have quite forgotten to ask you to take a lunch; bring a knife and fork, Jackson," said his lordship.

"My lord, I do assure you I don't require anything; the pleasure of seeing your lordship—"

"Oh, if you are from the country this morning, you must have an appetite," said Lord Walgrave; "try that *patè de fois gras;* it was given me by the Prussian minister; it was made for the King of Prussia's own table." Hopwood gazed on the savoury viand with a reverence which seemed to imply that the bare thought of his approaching it with a knife and fork would have been little short of sacrilege.

"Don't be afraid of it, Hopwood," said Lord Walgrave, as he observed his guest's hesitation; for he balanced the silver fork on his finger, as if he was ascertaining the weight

of it. "Jackson, help my friend Mr. Hopwood to a little of that *patè*."

"Oh, my lord, you do me too much honour."

"And what wine will you take, Hopwood? a glass of sherry? or, stay, I have some madeira that once belonged to George the Fourth," said his lordship; "fetch a bottle, Jackson."

"Oh, my lord, you quite distress me," ejaculated Hopwood, who felt himself elevated to such an unnatural height, that he most assuredly would have bobbed his head had he been entering the great gate of St. Paul's.

"Why, Hopwood, I don't give that wine to everybody; but to a friend, you know," said Lord Walgrave, significantly. "But you have daughters, eh?"

"One daughter, an only child, my lord," answered Mr. Hopwood.

"Really; and what age is she, pray?" inquired the nobleman.

"Just seventeen, my lord."

"Ah, indeed, a most interesting age, friend Hopwood; and is she pretty?"

"Why, my lord, our friends consider her remarkably pretty," answered Hopwood, with paternal pride; "but parents, my lord, are easily flattered."

"Not always, Hopwood, not always," answered his lordship; "but it is time you began to think of a suitable match for her."

"Oh, my lord, she is a child, a mere child, I assure you," replied the father; "she thinks more of a skipping-rope and a kitten, than a lover."

"At seventeen, too! she must be a marvel," said Lord Walgrave.

"Why, I may say that she is, my lord," continued Hopwood; "there are few girls like her; she is innocence itself, my lord; imagine a sheet of the whitest writing-paper, and you see the mind of my Georgina."

"A flattering picture, indeed, friend Hopwood," said Lord Walgrave, smiling; "ha!

ha! ha! innocence in petticoats!—good. But, my good friend, here is a young lady who, by your description, would grace any circle. Now, I'll be bound you can give her £50,000 on her marriage day?"

"Why, my lord, I think I could manage that, or a trifle more, without much inconvenience," said the ex-man of business, in the conscious pride of wealth.

"Well, then, my friend Hopwood, you must look out for a match which will elevate her in the world, and advance your own position," said Lord Walgrave.

"Oh, my lord, I should never think of looking beyond my own sphere," humbly responded Mr. Hopwood.

"That is your modesty, Hopwood," said the nobleman; "you are wrong; it is your duty to your child and yourself."

"Oh, my lord, it is not possible for me to think of such honour," answered Mr. Hopwood, putting aside his knife and fork, and gazing

steadfastly in his plate, as if overwhelmed at the bare idea of allying himself with nobility.

"You are mistaken, Hopwood," answered the nobleman; "look at myself, for example, —of course I only place myself as an example, to illustrate what I am about to say."

"Oh, my lord, of course; your lordship is so kind—"

"Well, now, I have some thought of retiring from the army, and marrying; and, do you think I should care whether the lady I made choice of was of a noble family, provided she was respectable, and had means? certainly not. Supposing I were to marry your daughter—of course, supposing," said his lordship, laughing.

"Oh, my lord, could I presume?" muttered the astounded Hopwood.

"Well, supposing, as I said," continued his lordship, "what should I do? why, pass you into one of my father's boroughs, and recommend you to my friend, Lord Melbourne,

for a baronetcy. Sir Simon Hopwood, Bart., Member for ————; what do you think of that, old friend, eh? Is it not worth trying for? such things are to be had;" and he familiarly touched his friend Hopwood, with one finger, on the shoulder.

The little eyes of the retired jeweller glistened like two paste knee-buckles; there was a tremulous convulsive twitching observable in his fingers, and he gradually drew up his feet till they were completely tucked under his chair. The vision of greatness thus conjured up by his noble entertainer, had completely bewildered him. He beheld in the perspective a long line of coronets, under which the arms of the Hopwoods might be quartered with some illustrious house; and his eye furtively glanced at the coronet and crest emblazoned upon the plate which glittered around him upon the table.

"Well, my friend Hopwood, what are you thinking of, eh?" asked Lord Walgrave, after he had allowed his guest to ponder some mi-

nutes on his suggestion. "Do you think my plan a good one, eh?"

"Sir Simon Hopwood, Bart.!" unconsciously muttered the retired man of business.

"And why not?" said his lordship; "it sounds as well as many of greater pretensions."

"Oh, my lord, I beg you ten thousand pardons," said the confused Hopwood; "I really forgot at the moment; but your lordship is so kind and condescending--"

"Tut! tut! my friend, never think of it," said his lordship; "we will talk further of this matter, never fear. I'll put you in a train —you must come some day and dine with me."

"Oh, my lord, if it ever were in my power to acknowledge such kindness," faltered the bewildered Hopwood.

"And now, my good friend," said the nobleman, "we will, if you please, talk of other business. I think, if I remember rightly, that I am your debtor for some small amount."

"Oh, I hope your lordship has not such an

opinion of me as to fancy, for a moment, that my visit had any such object," said Mr. Hopwood, with the utmost concern depictured in his countenance.

"No, no, by no means," said Lord Walgrave; "but, really, it is time it was settled, and—"

"Pray, my lord, do not mention a word of it," interposed Hopwood, "there are more suitable times; you will really hurt my feelings."

"Well, well, I would not do that, my good friend," returned his lordship, "but this morning has been quite devoted to business; just before you came I had quite a levee. I think I must have settled every account I had, eh, Jackson?" he said to the valet, who had just entered to take the breakfast things.

"Yes, indeed, my lord," responded the valet; "I believe the German gentleman was the last you paid in full. Here is a letter for your lordship," he said, handing a pink enve-

lope to his master, upon a salver. "Hunsman brought it, my lord, and waits below for an answer."

"A letter! Hunsman! eh!" ejaculated his lordship, taking the letter.

"My lord, I fear I intrude," said Mr. Hopwood, rising; "you have business."

"On no account, Hopwood; a mere trifle," said his lordship, taking his guest in the most friendly manner by the arm, and replacing him on his seat. "I see you so seldom, that I cannot afford to part with you so soon. With your leave I will just see what this note contains."

"Pray, my lord, consider me as nobody," said the humble-minded Hopwood.

"Ah, I see," said his lordship, reading the enclosure, which was as follows:—

"Dear Walgrave,—

"Can you contrive to run down on Thursday night? A few friends will be here. I wish

to introduce a person to you who may prove useful. Yours,

"ELIZA MILTOUNE.

"Englefield Green."

"Ah, you see, my friend Hopwood," continued Lord Walgrave, folding the letter, "these are the evils of having young, extravagant acquaintances. Here is a note from a young fellow, of family, requesting me to send him, by bearer, £200. Three or four times I have obliged him in this manner. It is true he returns it, and he is a man of such connexions that I am anxious to oblige him. But really, after settling all these accounts, I have scarcely £100 note left. Bring me my writing-case, Jackson; I must make an excuse. Don't disturb yourself, Hopwood, I shall not be an instant."

Whilst Jackson was bringing the writing materials, the ex-man of business was fidgetting in his chair, and the working of his coun-

tenance betrayed some important project proceeding within his mind. At length, just as Lord Walgrave was putting pen to paper, he broke the ice. "Might I interrupt you for one moment, my lord?" he said, in a tone of the most marked respect. "If I may take the liberty, without giving your lordship any offence—I assure you I don't intend any disrespect—"

"Speak out, Hopwood," said his lordship, looking up from the writing-case, "we are all friends — you need not fear to speak your mind."

"Why, my lord, I was thinking," said Hopwood, apparently afraid of proceeding; "Will your lordship do me a most particular favour?"

"Nothing would please me more," returned Lord Walgrave, smiling; "what can I oblige you in?"

"My lord, you will oblige me materially," said Mr. Hopwood, most seriously, "if you

will allow me to be your banker on this occasion. By so doing you will be able to oblige your friend, and me too."

"Oh, my dear fellow, impossible; particularly obliged to you, nevertheless," said his lordship, shaking his guest warmly by the hand; "God bless my heart! why, I owe you I don't know how much already."

"Pray, my lord, don't mention such a trifle," said Hopwood, earnestly, "and really, my lord, between friends, if I may take the liberty of saying so—"

"The liberty!" repeated the nobleman; "I am proud to acknowledge so respectable a friend as yourself; but as to accepting your very kind offer—"

"Indeed, my lord, if you do not grant me this favour," said Hopwood, as anxiously as if his life depended on it, "I shall think you consider me quite unworthy of your confidence and esteem."

"Ah, Hopwood, there you have me; you

are a rogue; you know I cannot withstand that," cried Lord Walgrave, as if sensibly touched with his friend's remark. "Give me the money; if it were double as much, I could not refuse it under such circumstances."

"Oh, my lord, you are too kind," cried the enraptured man of money. And never did Israelite tell his usurious gain with such trembling delight as that which possessed our retired tradesman, as he wrote a cheque for £200, and respectfully handed it over to his noble friend. Indeed, to such an extent had the noble lord won upon him, that had it been half his fortune, Hopwood would have been perfectly unsuspicious of design. As it was, the young nobleman placed the cheque beside him on the table, and turning to him with a gracious smile, that went to his heart, said, in the blandest and most benignant tone—

"Now, my dear Hopwood, this is very kind and well-meant of you; but, indeed, you must not place me in such embarrassing situations.

If I dislike one thing more than another, it is pecuniary obligation to friends. But, however, for once, rather than hurt your feelings—by the way, I had better give you some little slip of acknowledgment, eh?"

"Oh, by no means, my lord," answered Hopwood, as if quite shocked at the proposition; "it is not at all necessary."

"Why, I think so myself, as it is between friends," returned the nobleman, placing a particular stress upon the latter word; "so I will just finish my note, and dispatch the messenger."

Mr. Hopwood bowed most reverentially, and Lord Walgrave finished his note, which we will take the liberty to transcribe.

"Dear Eliza,—

"I will endeavour to be with you on Thursday evening. Your's,

"Walgrave.

"St. James's-place."

This laconic epistle he placed in an envelope, and the cheque in another.

"Jackson, tell Hunsman to come up," said his lordship.

A gentle knock at the door announced the messenger. His lordship rose himself, and opened the door. The same set of hard features made their appearance, which we formerly described at an evening convivial meeting with Jeffries, the attorney's clerk; though it will be necessary to mention, that many years had elapsed since that jovial time, which, indeed, will be more distinctly seen in another chapter. The only difference perceptible in the respectable Hunsman was, that his shoulders were a little more round than formerly, and the short black hair which was combed in so unpretending a manner over his forehead, had now assumed something of a grisly hue.

"Ah, Hunsman, my man, is that you?" his lordship kindly greeted the ex-functionary.

"Hope your lordship's well," responded

that respectable individual, jerking his hand to the place where the brim of his hat was usually to be found.

"This is the answer to your—to the letter you brought," said his lordship; "be careful of it, good Hunsman, and give my best respects."

"Yes, my lord," said Hunsman; "shall I say to—"

"There, there, you need say no more," interrupted his lordship, quickly; "take care of what I have given you—it is of consequence"—and, closing the door, Lord Walgrave resumed his seat.

It may be as well to mention that the letter Hunsman received such strict charge with, was merely the enclosure containing the few words we have copied above; that which contained the more imposing superscription of "pay the bearer £200," was safely deposited in the recess of his lordship's breast pocket. The good Hopwood, the while, was gazing steadfastly at

the polished steel fender, and his prolific imagination was shaping on its surface coronets of all degrees, and caps of maintainance.

"Bless me!" exclaimed his lordship, looking at the clock on the mantel-piece, as he threw himself into his chair, "I declare it is three o'clock; I had no notion of the hour;—but time does pass with friends."

"Oh, my lord, I am sure I must have trespassed," stammered his guest, aroused from his magnificent contemplation.

"Not at all; I'm greatly obliged to you, Hopwood, for such a friendly call," said his lordship, with much warmth of manner. "I trust that for the future we shall not be such strangers. You must come and dine with me, as I said; and, in the mean time, I shall look in upon you at your country box, and pay my respects to your wife and charming daughter." Mr. Hopwood was upon his legs, and bowing his acknowledgments for every gracious word.

"But I declare," continued his lordship, in

the same breath, "I quite forgot to inquire after Mrs. Hopwood, I was so interested in our conversation about your charming girl."

"My lord, you are so very condescending," repeated Mr. Hopwood; "if your lordship should give my humble cottage the honour of a visit, I shall be proud to introduce my wife to your lordship's notice. She is, I assure your lordship, a most estimable mother, and, as a wife, I declare to your lordship I don't know her equal—she cannot bear me out of her sight!"

"A perfect treasure! a perfect treasure!" exclaimed the nobleman; "really, Hopwood, your family quite interests me; trust me, I shall be with you in a few days; I shall not be easy till I make their acquaintance."

"My lord, I assure you, you make me the happiest of men."

"At Egham, you said?" continued his lordship, ringing the bell.

"Precisely so, my lord."

"I shall have no difficulty in finding you?"

"Oh, no, my lord, I flatter myself there are few people in Egham but know the name of Hopwood; indeed, my duties as a magistrate, and the interest I take in parish affairs to preserve us from radical domination, make me pretty conspicuous."

"Good! and, in the meantime, Hopwood, if you come to town, I shall certainly expect a call; and think upon what I have been saying—all things are possible, Hopwood—I see nothing whatever to hinder your advancement. However we will talk the matter over more seriously."

Mr. Hopwood could only answer by a deep inclination.

"And, remember, my particular respects to your estimable wife. Ah, that woman must be a treasure! and I kiss the hand of your charming Georgina. God bless you, my very worthy friend; take care of yourself. Jackson, attend my friend, Mr. Hopwood, to the door.

Till I see you again, then, farewell," and shaking him most warmly by the hand all the way to the drawing-room door, Hopwood bowing and stammering his gratitude, his lordship took his final leave, and the retired tradesman slided from the room, quite beside himself with the joy of his good fortune, and enchanted with the amiability and condescension of—from this date—his most particular and intimate friend, Viscount Walgrave.

CHAPTER VI.

"Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those."

"Into these ears of mine,
These credulous ears, he pour'd the sweetest words
That art or love could frame."

In the breakfast-parlour of a very pretty house, in the immediate neighbourhood of Egham, two young ladies were seated. One was about seventeen years of age, and her companion about a year younger. The elder of the two was rather tall, beautifully proportioned, possessing a transparent complexion, and a profusion of light brown hair. Her pretty face at first sight was of a timid or bashful cast; for her eyes were generally intent on some

occupation, and, if not, appeared to be studying the pattern of the carpet; but, when she raised them, by accident or otherwise, there was a singular expression of comic humour, which betrayed a latent disposition for mischief. And even when apparently most intent on threading beads, or hemming a cambric pocket-handkerchief, the corners of her little mouth would sometimes curl upward, at some point in the conversation passing around her, and her eyes would momentarily glide from her occupation, to the individual speaking, with a playful satire, showing a keen, though concealed sense of the ridiculous.

Her companion was not quite so old, and had not such natural advantages as herself. But the expression of her countenance was more ingenuous and artless, if not quite so *spirituel;* and if the extremely piquant tone of her friend was wanting, she appeared to possess a fund of good nature and amiability, which, in the eyes of many, would be infinitely

more valuable, though, perhaps, not at first sight so attractive.

The former of these two young ladies was Miss Georgina Hopwood, who as yet is only known to the reader by the flattering introduction of a fond parent; the latter was Miss Agnes Graham, who, some years since, was taken by her mother, then Mrs. Miltoune, either from a latent sense of duty, or, what is more likely, to answer some purpose of her own, from the tender superintendence of Mr. Jabez Hunsman, to whom she had been early consigned, for the purpose of being placed at school. She was known then by the name of Charlotte Amelia Russell, and in that name, it will be recollected, a certain bequest was made to her; but as, during the course of years, her mother had found it her interest to change her own state and name, by marrying a person named Maxwell, so we may suppose some equally cogent reason had induced her to alter the name of her child. What that particular

reason was, can only be a matter of vague surmise; be it, however, what it may, as it pleased her mother so to call her, we must, under this name, so re-introduce her—after having passed the usual routine of school changes and school studies—now residing with her mother at a very handsome establishment on Englefield Green.

Agnes was a delicate, fragile young creature, of a tender and confiding disposition, grateful for kindness, and patient under wrong; yet her amiability had not gained her an asylum where it is most expected—in the heart of her parent; for she was only living, as it were by sufferance, in her house. Seldom was she greeted with a kind word; seldom, indeed, was she in the presence of her mother, except to perform some office about her person, when her own servant was otherwise occupied; and even the performance of these little duties, which would have been a source of pleasure to a girl like Agnes, had they been kindly received,

were generally accompanied by harsh language and contumely; the slightest deviation from the capricious and imperious will of her mother, would invariably subject her to the most mortifying and injurious treatment.

Mrs. Maxwell had several overtures of acquaintanceship from families in the neighbourhood, who appeared to think that living with her husband and family, and keeping a handsome establishment, were sufficient proofs of respectability; but such overtures were neither answered nor acknowledged. She had, however, many visitors from London, and occasionally gave parties to those who, if we might judge from equipage and outward appearance, were of distinction. To all of these Agnes was a perfect stranger; she was never introduced to any; her very name was unknown to them; and such conduct was the more remarkable, as Mrs. Maxwell had other children, who were treated by her with every mark of affectionate regard.

An unnatural mother appears to be an anomaly in creation, and, from its rare and unfrequent occurrence, would seem to be intended by nature as an exception to her beautiful dispensation, in order to show, by an occasional disgusting contrast, the true value—if such a measureless blessing can be sufficiently valued—of maternal love. Poor Agnes was of such a gentle and enduring disposition, that she could only reply to such injuries by tears. If it were not true, it would seem an overstrained fiction, that so much gentleness and amiability should be so harshly requited, by one whose duty it was to have cherished and protected her, and smoothed her passage through life. But so strange and unnatural a course of treatment may perhaps be accounted for—and only in such a way—upon the faith of a most repulsive axiom, that those whom we injure, we most detest. Poor Agnes endeavoured to beguile the weariness and disgust produced by the treatment she received at home, by culti-

vating acquaintances abroad. By her intimacy with the Hopwoods she was known to several respectable families in the neighbourhood, with whom her cheerfulness and amiability had rendered her a favourite. But her principal friend and companion was Georgina Hopwood, to whom she was always welcome, for her parents had so few visitors, and kept her so closely to her studies, that, besides her masters, Georgina had seldom the opportunity of seeing a fresh face. It was therefore only through her friend and former schoolfellow, Agnes, that she heard the little gossip of the neighbourhood. Poor Agnes had no such care bestowed upon her; she was left to go where she pleased, and do as she liked. Her mother was frequently in town, and seldom made any inquiry concerning her.

On the morning referred to in the opening of this chapter, Agnes had been to Egham, and called on her friend Georgina on her return. She was unusually animated, and Georgina had left her work, and drawn a chair close beside

her, to learn what had occurred, to put her companion into such good spirits.

"Oh, Georgina," said Agnes, "I am so delighted; I have been to Major Caisson's this morning, to take Mrs. Caisson the purse I netted for her, and I saw her nephew again, Mr. Hervey."

"And did he say all those fine things over again?" asked Georgina.

"Oh, more, a thousand times; he said—"

"What?"

"That I was the prettiest girl in Egham," said Agnes, with a little hesitation.

"Well, I am sure that was not much of a compliment," remarked Georgina, laughing.

"Ah. but he said more than that, Georgina; he said—"

"Well, tell me all about it, Agnes."

"I'll tell you another time," said Agnes, blushing; "but he walked with me all the way here, and he says that he is an officer of artillery at Woolwich, and he is only to stay

here a fortnight, and that the officers have such balls and reviews."

"How I should like to see him," said Georgina, looking in the glass.

"Well, but, Georgina, I was going to tell you," said Agnes; "Mrs. Caisson has two or three young friends coming this evening, just to have a little music, and she begged me to ask your mamma to let you go there for an hour or two. Do you think she will?"

"Perhaps she will; but don't say a word about Mr. Hervey," said Georgina.

"Very well, if you think that would make any difference," said Agnes, innocently.

"Ah, Agnes, you are a happy girl," said Georgina; "you can visit about, see every body, have beaux, and here am I, shut up as though I were in a nunnery. I'm sure I'm quite old enough to visit, and see friends at home, and I will, too," said the spoiled child, pettishly; "they shall see if I am to be shut up all my life;" and the colour rose to her temples.

"You would be sorry to change places with me, Georgina," said Agnes, with a deep sigh; "the reason that I go about as I please is, that no one cares for me, or what becomes of me."

"Yes, Agnes, that is very bad, I know," said Georgina, sympathizing with her friend; "but then to lead such a weary life as I do. But I *will* amuse myself, whether they let me or not."

"Oh, but, Georgina, your parents treat you so kindly," said Agnes; "look at this;"—and taking off her glove, she showed a large mark on the back of her hand.

"Why, what is that?" asked Georgina, with surprise.

"One morning, when I was dressing my mamma's hair, I placed a curl wrong, and she struck me with an open knife," replied Agnes, sorrowfully, the tears coming into her eyes.

"Oh, how shocking! and you never told me!" said Georgina, in an indignant tone; "it is well for her that she has not me for a daugh-

ter; but, poor Agnes, you have not half spirit enough."

Agnes sighed again, and dried her eyes.

"Well, but Agnes, never mind;" continued her friend; "is Mr. Hervey handsome?"

"Handsome! Georgina, he is beautiful," said Agnes; the subject restoring her at once to her former gaiety. "Oh, I do hope your mamma will let you go; you will like him so; but you must not admire him too much, dear Georgina."

"You need not fear that; because you know, Agnes, that you are the prettiest girl in Egham," said Georgina, archly. Agnes laughed, and was about to reply, but was prevented by the entrance of Mrs. Hopwood.

Mrs. Hopwood appeared about the age of five-and-forty, was rather tall, and of a comely, matron-like appearance. She might be considered somewhat over-dressed for a person of such retired habits; for her morning-cap resembled a huge bouquet, so entirely covered

was it with flowers. A large braid of hair, extending almost the length of each cheek, was apparently intended to conceal the advances which time had made, in his gradual metamorphosis of a young and good-looking girl, into a staid, respectable-looking lady. But, notwithstanding braids, and flowers, and glittering chains, and trinkets, years will make themselves visible; and there is no cosmetic can quite restore a complexion of five-and-forty years' wear to the bloom of seventeen; no artifice that can quite compensate for the silken tresses of youth. There was, however, some little excuse for Mrs. Hopwood's lingering remains of vanity. She could not forget that she had been for many a day the toast of all the dashing clerks of Cannon-street; and the recollection of those days of triumph, when she reigned the acknowledged belle of the Mansion-house balls, was still dear to her. On her entrance, she greeted Agnes with great kindness and cordiality.

"Oh, Mrs. Hopwood," said Agnes, after the first inquiries were over, "I have such a favour to beg of you. Mrs. Caisson has two or three young friends this evening, and has begged me to ask you to let Georgina come for an hour or two. The major says he will see her safe home." Mrs. Hopwood looked very grave at this request. It was one of those weighty matters which she could hardly take upon herself to decide; for anything in which Georgina was concerned was an affair of serious deliberation between the worthy pair.

"Why, my dear, I hardly know what to do," replied Mrs. Hopwood, balancing each word; "what would Mr. Hopwood say?"

"Why, mamma, you know, papa need not be told a word of the matter; he will not return from London till to-morrow."

"If I could go with you, my dear," said Mrs. Hopwood, "perhaps—"

"But you would not like to leave the house while papa is absent," interposed her daughter.

"That would be the difficulty," said the careful lady.

"Oh, pray let her go, ma'am, for this once; we will take great care of her," said Agnes.

"Do, mamma; you know I never go out," said Georgina, pouting; "I am like a bird in a cage."

"Why, my dear, you must remember the scrupulous attention with which your papa and myself wish you to be brought up," said Mrs. Hopwood, seriously; "you know his objection to parties, for girls so young as yourself."

"Why, mamma, I have heard you speak many times of your dancing at the Lord Mayor's balls, long before you were of my age, when you used to be the belle of the assembly, you know, mamma," said Georgina, slyly looking in her mother's face, and kissing her cheek. The features of the former belle relaxed insensibly into a smile, at the sadly-pleasing reminiscence.

"Come, mamma, only for once," urged Georgina.

"The major will bring her home," suggested Agnes.

"Well, well, you are a spoiled child, and must have your way, I suppose," said Mrs. Hopwood, good-naturedly; "I don't know what your papa will say."

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" cried both the girls at once, and they ran off to consult on matters of *parure* for the evening. Agnes went home to look out a few articles of dress, and then returned to assist her friend, with whose appearance she seemed considerably more interested than with her own.

CHAPTER. VII.

"With ev'ry pleasing, ev'ry prudent part,
Say, 'What can Chloe want?' She wants a heart."

"All nature fades extinct; and she alone
Heard, felt, and seen, possesses ev'ry thought,
Fills ev'ry sense, and pants in ev'ry vein."

It was rather late when the young ladies arrived at Major Caisson's; for though the *toilette* of neither was very much distinguished from the general style of young persons on such occasions, yet novelty, in the present instance, with regard to Georgina, excused a little extra study. When they entered the neat little drawing-room, they were kindly welcomed by Mrs. Caisson and the major, who did not expect to see Georgina, knowing the very exclu-

sive system which her parents had thought proper to adopt with regard to her—a system which the major had frequently combatted with Mr. Hopwood, but without shaking his opinion with regard to its advantages in the formation of the female character. Amidst all this friendly exchange of civility, Agnes found means to whisper in the ear of her friend—

"That is Mr. Hervey, sitting on the chair, with Mrs. Caisson's little dog, Fido, next to him." Georgina's eyes had already made the circuit, of the room and had decided upon the identity of Mr. Hervey, before Agnes made her confidential communication. She had likewise, with peculiar quickness, observed that Mr. Hervey's eyes had been fixed upon Agnes, from the moment she entered the room, and that he was only prevented, by the conversation of an elderly lady upon his left hand, from being at her side.

There are few females, be their age what it may, who can bear with equanimity the con-

viction that another—even a dear friend—is to occupy the exclusive attention of the only desirable person present; and Georgina's glance, rapid as it was, had sufficiently informed her of that fact. She had not been much in society, and the flattery of men was unknown to her; but she had nevertheless learned, through some freemasonry of the sex, that she was a very charming young person. In her appearance, at first sight, as we before remarked, she had decidedly the advantage of Agnes. Her retiring manner and *naïve* replies were peculiarly attractive. Many, in observing her apparently modest but unstudied demeanour, would have considered her a complete child of nature; yet few men could look at her, and not deem her worthy of particular admiration.

Without being regularly handsome, Georgina was decidedly what is called a gentleman's beauty; and, after all, let the ladies say what they like, the gentlemen are the best judges.

Men are captivated by a thousand nameless attractions, which women cannot appreciate, judging, as they do, solely by the features. It may generally be set down as a rule, when females particularly "wonder what the men can see to admire" in any individual of their own sex, that she is a very interesting and attractive person. Now the glances which Georgina occasionally threw from beneath her long lashes, so expressive and full of meaning, could hardly fail to make an impression upon every man who came within the range of so powerful a battery; though ladies might perhaps be inclined to misinterpret such innocent demonstrations.

In the present instance Georgina was so much piqued by observing the decided preference which Mr. Hervey had shown by his looks towards Agnes, that she longed to try her power; for the love of conquest seems inherent in the sex; not, indeed, the subjugation by brute force, which satisfies the coarser pas-

sions of men, but that which works a more secure victory, through the more refined medium of the heart. This first little development of coquetry on the part of Georgina might perhaps have been the effect of a thoughtless disposition, or the vanity inseparable from youth and good looks. But, from whatever cause it proceeded, she seemed determined to draw the attention of Mr. Hervey to herself; for, no sooner had she disengaged herself from Mrs. Caisson, than she exclaimed—

"Oh, I declare, there is little Fido!" and, with her hands clasped together, she ran, with almost an infantile simplicity, towards the little pet; and falling on her knees, regardless of her white muslin frock, began to load it with caresses. Whether from the abrupt nature of Georgina's advance, or from the caprice natural to a spoiled puppy, or from any hidden cause only explainable by Georgina herself, the dog, considered the most docile of its kind, suddenly jumped up with a loud cry, and sought protec-

tion in the arms of Mr. Hervey, with whom it seemed an especial favourite, leaving Georgina upon her knees, with her hand to her mouth, like a school-girl who had cut her finger.

"God bless me! I hope the dog has not hurt you," said Mr. Hervey, turning to Georgina, and assisting her to rise.

"I hardly know, sir," faltered the young lady, in a voice not much above a whisper; "I am so frightened; but my hand smarts terribly."

"I am sorry to hear that: let me see," said the young man; "I shall never forgive him if he has injured so pretty a hand," he added, taking one of the whitest and prettiest hands in the world, which she, with the utmost simplicity had submitted to him. He could discover, however, neither speck nor scratch, although he devoted to it the most careful examination; and as she gently withdrew it from his pressure, his regards naturally sought the countenance of the possessor, when he encountered the glance

of a pair of beautiful eyes, in which there was then neither mischief nor mirth, but which beamed full upon him with a most timid, though grateful expression of regard. The young man seemed quite astonished, for he allowed her to glide from the group which the accident had gathered round, without saying a word. Georgina retired bashfully to the side of Mrs. Caisson, as though quite ashamed of having created so much inquiry.

"What a *very* charming girl!" exclaimed Mr. Hervey, as he followed her with his eyes to the position she had taken. "Ah, Miss Graham, how do you do? who is that very pretty girl you have brought with you?"

"She is my friend, Miss Hopwood," answered Agnes, rather drily; for these were the first words her ardent admirer of the morning had addressed to her.

"Well, then, I declare your friend, Miss Hopwood, is one of the prettiest girls I have seen," returned Mr. Hervey, with that want of

tact and feeling towards an interesting young person of whom he had for some days been a professed admirer, only excusable in a young man of some one or two-and-twenty years of age.

"Indeed!" said Agnes; "she is very well, but I have never heard her considered a *beauty*."

"Well, perhaps not exactly a beauty," replied Mr. Hervey, laughing, for he had remarked the slight tone of pique with which she uttered the last word: perhaps the bad taste of expressing so unfeigned an admiration of another, to one whom he had styled the "prettiest girl in Egham," might have become apparent to him, for he immediately subdued his tone.

"I had no idea that Egham was so seductive," he continued, smiling at Agnes, "for I have been here but a few days, and I declare I have been in love all the time. But," he whispered in her ear, "the greatest beauties, you

know, do not always make the greatest impressions." In whatever way this odd, left-handed compliment was intended, the amiability of Agnes induced her to consider it as the *amende honorable*, and she began to be angry with herself for having felt any pique at the praises of her friend. The feeling of rivalry being at an end, she had no scruple in extolling the talents and beauty of her friend Georgina, and, above all, the innocence and simplicity of her mind; to all which her admirer listened, perhaps with a too indulgent ear.

Georgina had chosen a situation not exactly to her taste, though perhaps, at the moment, it was the best for the effect she desired. She was seated between Mrs. Caisson and an elderly lady, who were carrying on, across her, an animated discourse on the depravity of the female servants of the present day. They were so different to what they were formerly. One ascribed the unhappy change in their morals to the Sunday schools and the "Penny Magazine;" while the other was of opinion it was all owing to

the demoralizing influence of the new police. Georgina, not feeling much interest in the discussion, had directed several furtive glances around the room, and her vanity was not a little flattered to find that Mr. Hervey, although conversing with Agnes, was directing the whole language of which his eyes were master, towards herself. The situation of Agnes, seated as she was, *tête-à-tête* with her admirer, appeared much too pleasant to Georgina to be endurable to her. She therefore speedily beckoned her former school-fellow, who with the greatest alacrity obeyed her signal, and Georgina, taking her arm, they withdrew to another part of the room.

"Well, Georgina, and what do you think of my beau?" was the first question that Agnes asked.

"Oh, he is middling," replied Georgina, with the most perfect indifference; "I don't think much of him—at least, not *very* much." Now, the truth was, that he was by no means indifferent to her; for, in the first place, *he*

was the only young man in the room, and, in the next, he was tall and well-proportioned, with good eyes, and good teeth, and a certain easy, unembarrassed air, acquired by mixing in good society; besides, it was Georgina's first experiment.

"Now, that is not grateful of you," said Agnes; "for, do you know, he said you were the prettiest girl he had ever seen?"

"Ah, but not the prettiest girl in Egham," said Georgina, laughing.

In the mean time, Mr. Hervey sought his uncle, the major, who, as well as his lady, was busy in discussion, though of a different character to the merits of maid-servants. The major was a sort of uncle Toby in his way. He was remarkable for his benevolence of character, and his hobby was connected with his profession. He was a retired artillery officer, and though no longer able to serve his country in the field, he still devoted to her his talents in retirement, by endeavouring to make such

improvements in the engines of destruction, as to kill the greatest possible number of men, at the smallest possible expenditure of powder and ball. His grand invention was a piece of double ordnance, which was called, by a waggish military friend, the "Siamese Twins." A very handsome brass model was under a glass case, amongst the ornaments in the drawing-room, and its great use and advantages in unmasting and sinking vessels at sea, were fully explained to every visitor.

The major had a younger nephew, a cousin of the cadet at Woolwich, now visiting him, whom he had vainly endeavoured to bring up respectably; for such was the naturally perverse disposition of the urchin—he was not more than eleven years old—that it seemed a hopeless task. Young as he was, he had been expelled from two schools, and he had not been sent back to his uncle's house more than a week before he absconded in company with the twopenny post-boy of the village, with whom

he had formed a strict alliance. When he was discovered, he was loitering in the purlieus of the post-office, soliciting to be enrolled amongst the respectable fraternity to which his friend belonged.

This hopeful youth was now employed by his uncle in grinding charcoal, mixing sulphur, and preparing various other combustibles, by which he conducted his experiments; an employment, by the way, which was well suited to the genius of the lad, as it gave him ample opportunity for mischief. If the talents of the uncle lay in projectiles, so did that of the nephew, at a humble distance; for, whilst the one was busy upon shells and Congreve rockets, the other was equally intent upon the fabrication of squibs and crackers; and if the career of the major's experimental rockets alarmed proprietors for the safety of their ricks and outbuildings, so, in the same proportion, was there scarcely an old woman, for many miles round, who had not, at one time or another, been

frightened out of her wits by the explosion of the smaller class of projectiles ingeniously fastened to the tail of her cloak by this young powder-monkey. The youth's appearance was somewhat singular. His head was as round as a bullet, with the hair cut extremely close, as it had twice taken fire from explosions, in the latter of which his eye-brows had been completely removed. His legs were unusually long in proportion to his size, and in his tight-fitting jacket and trowsers, his arms close to his sides, his hands searching the very recesses of his pockets, with his legs apart, which was his usual attitude when unemployed, or when concocting some new scheme, he bore no unapt resemblance to a pair of fire-tongs.

Mr. Hervey, it has been mentioned, sought his uncle, who was conversing with a neighbour upon his favourite topic, of the rare advantage the service would experience by the adoption of his double revolving chain apparatus, and the young hopeful was seated on a stool at the foot

of his uncle, eagerly imbibing every syllable relating to the merits of these organs of destructiveness. Mr. Hervey, in thus seeking his uncle, had some few inquiries which he wished resolved, regarding the handsome Georgina Hopwood, who had certainly, whether intentionally or not, created an unusual sensation in the young man's mind. But knowing the impracticable nature of his uncle when engaged on his favourite subject, he quietly drew a chair close to him, expecting that a few minutes would close the discussion. The little interval he beguiled with a pleasant sort of castle-building, self-apostrophizing speculation peculiar to the age of twenty, or thereabouts.

"You see, sir," said the major, earnestly, "that the range of a piece of ordnance, of the calibre I mentioned, rarely exceeds eight hundred and seventy yards, whereas the number of yards which my double action piece, carrying, remember, a chain-shot of thirty-two pounds, would range—"

"Not more than seventeen," said Mr. Hervey, "I'd bet my life on it!"

"Not more than what?" cried the major, turning sharply round upon his nephew.

"Seventeen!" repeated the nephew, looking at his uncle with some surprise.

"Is that all your Woolwich studies have taught you, sir?" asked the major with some slight asperity.

"My Woolwich studies, sir!" repeated the young man, wondering; "what on earth have my Woolwich studies to do with the matter?"

"Why, Edward, you are foolish to-night, surely," said the major, in a half-bantering tone.

"I really do not understand you, sir," said the nephew, with all the offended dignity of a young cadet.

"Then I think we are precisely in a similar position," returned the major; "you interrupt me in my explanation to Captain Roberts, of the comparative range of artillery, by declaring

my cannon would not range more than seventeen yards—"

"Oh, sir, I beg your pardon," said the cadet, laughing, "I was not thinking, at that moment, of the range of your cannon; I was thinking of the age of Miss Hopwood."

"Miss ——"

The old major was about to have added a word at which his gallantry would afterwards have been shocked; but it was an equivoque which bore almost too hard upon his hobby, and the very best-natured men will, on such occasions, be trepanned into hasty expressions. That any one could be thinking of Miss Hopwood during a discussion of such public importance as his chain ordnance, was one of those unaccountable freaks of the human mind, of which the major had no conception. He was spared the pains, however, of investigating this new branch of study, by a yell of delight from his goblin nephew, who ran about the room, leaping and clapping his hands, like Sir Walter

Scott's elfin page. No sooner had the youth comprehended the joke against his uncle, than he jumped up with this boisterous exhibition of mirth, and soon made every body in the room comprehend the nature of it. The cadet secretly wished his youthful cousin blown up on the stick of one of his own sky-rockets, for giving this unexpected publicity to his private reflections, and creating some tittering at his expense; but the simple-minded Georgina could not at all understand why her age should become matter for Hervey's meditations.

"Well, I'm sure, I think Mr. Hervey does nothing but think of you, Georgina," said Agnes.

"La! Agnes, what should he think of me for?" said Georgina, in the most innocent tone imaginable.

Some card-tables were formed; but Georgina never played at cards—it was contrary to Mr. Hopwood's system of education; therefore she retired with her friend Agnes to a snug corner

of the room, where they might converse at liberty. Their retreat, however, was almost immediately invaded by Mr. Hervey, who seated himself next to Georgina.

"How is it that you have forsaken the card-players, Mr. Hervey?" asked Agnes.

"Because I find 'metal more attractive,'" answered the cadet, casting a most languishing regard towards Georgina; "indeed, on such a beautiful night as this, I would rather be in the woods, listening to the nightingale, than playing at cards. What say you, Miss Hopwood?"

"Oh, charming!" said Georgina, clasping her hands; "cannot we go?"

"La! my dear, what are you thinking of?" said Agnes.

"Why, I fear there are some here who might object to such an experiment," said the cadet, "though it would be more pleasant than a crowded room—at least to a poetic, sensitive mind, which I am sure you possess, Miss Hopwood."

"I cannot say quite so much for myself," she answered; "but I certainly prefer the retirement of our own lovely little garden at home, to all the charms of society."

"I was certain of it," exclaimed the enraptured young man; "your mind is essentially poetic. You love the poetry of Byron?"

"Oh, I worship it!"

"Why, Georgina," said Agnes, looking at her with surprise, "I never saw you with a book of poetry in your hand, in my life."

"Well, my dear Agnes, surely I may love poetry without always having a book in my hand," said Georgina. "Can you repeat any of those beautiful passages of Byron's, Mr. Hervey?"

Mr. Hervey looked at her with ecstacy; for, like many young men of twenty, or thereabouts, he adored Byron, and was brimful of sentiment. The gentle Georgina on her part assumed an attitude of the most intense admiration, whilst he commenced the well-known

lines—perhaps fancying them appropriate—in a voice intended to convey the deepest pathos—

> "Maid of Athens, ere we part,
> Give, oh, give me back my heart!"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Mr. Hervey," exclaimed Agnes, putting her hands to her ears, "do not give us any sickly love-poetry; rather than listen to that, I would prefer wandering in the woods by moonlight, as you suggested."

"I would advise you to try it, Miss Graham," observed her late admirer, not able to conceal his chagrin at the interruption; "perhaps it might give you sentiment," he added, sarcastically.

"It would more likely give me cold," said Agnes, drily.

Mr. Hervey made a sort of constrained inclination of the head, as if consenting to the propriety of a remark not worth answering; but he exchanged a most significant look of

pity with Georgina, which was fortunately unobserved by Agnes. The extraordinary personal conceit of young men of twenty, or thereabouts, is quite remarkable. The lively manner in which Agnes had checked the young gentleman's poetic sensibilities had wounded his self-love. She had gently taken him down from his poetic pedestal, where, he flattered himself, he was most calculated to shine; and, as he had not wit enough to mount again, he betook himself to the never-failing and magnanimous refuge of the dull—he gave her his pity.

It need not be supposed, however, that Agnes was such a very matter-of-fact person. She loved poetry, and often had she endangered the purse of the County Fire-office, by dwelling upon the sorrows of the "Bride of Abydos," at a time when she should have been fast asleep. She had all the sentiment of sixteen, but, in the present instance, there was nothing to call it forth. The fact was, her

feelings were anything but sentimental at that moment. She felt hurt with Mr. Hervey, dissatisfied with Georgina, and amazed with herself for feeling anything about it. But she could not forget that this gay Lothario had been flirting with her for some days,—that he had made all manner of advances towards her confidence,—had constituted himself her *chevalier*. She fancied, therefore, that she had a certain right to his special attention, a kind of property in him for the time being, and flattered herself with displaying her triumph to her friend; when, behold, the pretty edifice which she had built proves to be mere frost-work, and melts away at a single glance from the eyes of Georgina. It is true that her feelings were not violently wounded; nevertheless, they were sufficiently mortified not to be able to hear her versatile chevalier making love to her friend before her face, with any degree of patience.

"Now, Mr. Hervey," pursued Agnes,

"though sentimental poetry might charm one more among the scenes you recommend, yet, I'm sure, your experience can furnish some other recital for our amusement while the card-playing continues."

"If I knew how I could accommodate your taste, Miss Graham," said the cadet, relaxing nothing of his offended dignity, "I would most willingly; but I fear my poor ability will be too hardly taxed."

"If you did but know a good ghost story, now," said Agnes, with grave comicality; "something truly horrible. I remember once crying myself to sleep at school about the apparition of a lady with three heads. Are you fond of ghost stories, Mr. Hervey? Georgina delights in them."

"La! Agnes, how can you say so?" said Georgina.

"Miss Graham is joking with us," observed Mr. Hervey, seriously.

"Indeed I am not," said Agnes, "I like a ghost story of all things."

"Then, I am sorry I cannot oblige you," returned the young gentleman from Woolwich, very gravely, "for my talent does not lie in that way."

"Oh, that's a pity. I suppose your talent lies more in calculating ages," said Agnes, slyly; "however, I hope when you come to Egham again, you will be provided with a store."

"Then, in the mean time, I must find a receipt to make them," returned the cadet, without noticing the former hint.

"I can give you that," uttered a voice close at his elbow, which made them start. On looking, they perceived the urchin nephew with a broad grin upon his face. "If you want the very best," he continued, "you must grind your charcoal very fine, add two ounces of nitre, two ounces of sulphur, two ounces of saltpetre, and mix a small quantity of spirits of wine; but if—"

"What is he talking about?" asked Georgina, laughing.

"Why, about crackers," returned young scapegrace; "and, I say, Miss Georgina," and he bent forward to her ear, and continued, in a voice intended to be confidential, "if you will promise not to say a word, I mean to singe your old pa's wig for him one day, when I catch him this way. It will be such a lark!" And, with this pleasant intimation of some sinister design upon the person of her respected parent, he bounded off like a young kangaroo, to some other part of the room.

"What a monster!" ejaculated Georgina, with a becoming expression of horror at the bare contemplation of such a catastrophe as that threatened, though scarcely able to resist a burst of laughter.

"I wonder whether your young cousin is fond of Byron and moonlight, Mr. Hervey?" asked Agnes, gravely, of the young cadet; and, without waiting for a reply, she conti-

nued—"but I shall go and study the art of 'speculation' at the card-table, and leave you to entertain Georgina with the 'Maid of Athens.'" Saying which she made her way to the card-players, leaving her friend and *ci-devant* admirer *tête-à-tête*.

"Your friend Miss Graham would be really a very nice girl, but that I fear her taste is not very refined," observed the young gentleman, with the manner of one who felt himself at liberty to speak more freely; "but I am sure, Miss Hopwood, you will readily appreciate me when I say, that a girl who is deficient in sensibility wants the greatest charm of life."

Georgina perfectly coincided with the sentimental cadet.

"Now, my dear Miss Hopwood," he continued, "though I have had but the pleasure of your acquaintance for so short a time, yet I feel as if I had known you for years. I am sure there is a congeniality in our feelings and pursuits which would be quite delightful.

If I might be permitted to cultivate so charming a commencement—"

"Indeed, you are very flattering, Mr. Hervey," whispered Georgina, her eyes fixed on the carpet.

"I would not dare to flatter such beauty and talent," said the young man, with enthusiasm. "I speak, excuse me if I am bold enough to say, the sentiment of my heart. During my stay at Egham, perhaps you will permit me to call at your house?"

"My papa would be glad to see you, but you would not see *me*," said Georgina, with the most touching simplicity of manner.

"Really that is too strict a seclusion," said the dejected cadet; "do you not walk out occasionally with your friend Miss Graham?"

"Never, without my mamma; it is a mere chance that I am here to-night. Our garden, which is large, is the only place where I am allowed to walk alone."

"Then, it must be a second garden of Eden,"

exclaimed the enamoured cadet; "do not consider me the serpent, if I disturb your meditations some fine evening."

"Oh, that would be romantic!" cried the artless Georgina. "And that reminds me that I must speak to papa; for the garden-gate has never been repaired since the garden was entered last year. Would you believe it?—it is merely fastened by a latch, and I am there so late sometimes as nine o'clock in these nice, warm, moonlight evenings."

"That is very neglectful," said the cadet, thoughtfully, as if revolving in his mind some ingenious speculation; but further confidential intercouse was stayed, by Mrs. Caisson's approach.

"Well, my dear Georgina, this is a sad dull evening for you, who do not play at cards," said the old lady, kindly. But Georgina hastened to assure her to the contrary, when the old lady's eye caught her young nephew amusing himself by looking over the heterogeneous con-

tents of his pockets. His hands were as black as soot, and his face was likewise sadly begrimed.

"James, what are you doing here in that condition, sir?" said his aunt, angrily; "if you touch any lady's dress, which you are mischievous enough to do, you will spoil it, to a certainty."

"Can't you let me alone, aunt? I am not doing any harm," grumbled Master James.

"Major, do pray look at this boy," said Mrs. Caisson, raising her voice, "and see if he is fit to be here."

"What, you young rascal, you have been in my study, have you?" said the major, rising from the card-table, and inspecting his assistant in the fine arts; "you will blow the house up some day, you young vagabond, you will. Did I not tell you never to go there without me?"

"If I blow the house up, I can do it as well without you as with you," sulkily returned the young connoisseur in crackers.

"Go along, you impudent young scapegrace," said his uncle, angrily, "and do not show your face here again to-night."

The boy slowly packed his pockets, and, without saying a word, surlily withdrew.

"I declare," said Mrs. Caisson, "what with that boy, and the major's rockets and gunpowder, I can scarcely sleep in my bed at night."

"Well, my dear," replied the major, "we will get rid of the lad the moment I can find any friend who will take him to sea. I shall be as glad as yourself to see him out of the house."

"I was thinking, my dear," said Mrs. Caisson, "how we could amuse Georgina, whilst this card-playing continues?"

"I have it," said the major, touching his forehead with the tip of his forefinger; "fetch my pamphlet on 'projectiles,' and Edward will explain to her my improvement on Congreve rockets."

"Sir, I fear Miss Hopwood will not appreciate such study," remarked the young gentleman from Woolwich, in a tone which argued his perfect knowledge of young ladies' tastes.

"Well then, sir," returned the major, "suppose you try whether Miss Hopwood will appreciate a sandwich, or some such thing," observing that such things were then in actual progress round the room; and, as he spoke, the lad that took care of the major's pony, approached, disguised in a blue livery-coat, and, stumbling against the foot-stool, helped Georgina to a very plentiful supply of those neatly-cut, triangular-shaped pieces of bread-and-butter and ham, known by the name of sandwiches. A withering look of contempt from the cadet, nearly annihilated the delinquent, who wished himself up to his ears in his master's water-butt; whilst a gallant scramble for the stray sandwiches ensued, between the major and his accomplished nephew.

By this time the interest of many of the card-

players had taken a direction in favour of the contents of the trays, then in a rapid course of circulation. The major was making a tour amongst the ladies, taking wine with them, and relating the wonders of his rockets, when suddenly a most astounding explosion was heard, which at once extinguished the lights, and was quickly followed by a whiz-z-z-z—bang—bang—bang—in endless succession, whilst one of the major's projectiles was seen making the tour of the room, followed by a train of every coloured light, and scattering a profusion of sparks amongst the bewildered guests.

Screaming and scrambling for safety became the order of the night. Some dived beneath the card-tables, others made umbrellas of chairs to protect themselves from the incendiary shower; whilst the cause of terror, having made the circuit of the room unmolested, took the best seat vacant, (being the couch which Georgina and her admirer had just vacated,) and having whizzed amidst a blaze of sparks for half a

minute undisturbed, extinguished itself with a report like the major's "Siamese Twins," leaving the room in complete darkness, and a cloud of smoke as thick and as suffocating as the gun-room of a seventy-four at the battle of Trafalgar.

Lights were speedily procured, the windows were thrown open, the ladies handed from their several places of refuge, and smelling-bottles were in active requisition. On the first alarm, Georgina had seized the arm of her admiring companion for protection, and the enamoured cadet, who, from the nature of his studies, easily detected the nature of their unwelcome visitant, was delighted at the event, since it afforded him the happiness of extending his protection to the object of his admiration.

Encircling her slender waist, therefore, he almost carried her from the couch on which they had been seated, and took her, for refuge and security, behind one of the curtains in the recess of a window, where, with his lovely charge, he

awaited, in unspeakable happiness, the termination of the fiery shower.

Meantime, the ladies were slowly recovering from their dismay, and examining, with rueful looks, their scorched habiliments. The moment Mrs. Caisson—the feathers on whose turban, by the way, were so metamorphosed as to give her head the appearance of being covered with penitential ashes—sufficiently recovered her ideas, her first apprehension was for Georgina, about whose safety she was particularly solicitous. Agnes, too, having escaped without a spark, immediately looked round for her friend, who was nowhere visible. Her name was loudly called, and the cadet, drawing back the curtain with one hand, relieved her friends from their anxiety.

The picture was interesting. The beautiful Georgina was supported by the gallant cadet, her head reclined upon his shoulder, whilst he bent his enraptured gaze upon her apparently inanimate countenance. He was speedily re-

lieved from a situation which seemed to possess for him such a charm. Mrs. Caisson, Agnes, and other ladies, who were not wholly absorbed in their own misfortunes, quickly applied remedies which, indeed, Georgina seemed to need but little, for she almost immediately recovered.

When order was in some degree restored, and the nature of the damage was found to be limited to goods and chattels only, mutual inquiries ensued. The major knew pretty well the nature, as well as the author of the mischief; but, ascending to his study, as he called his room where he projected his experiments, he found it ransacked. Gunpowder was strewn in every direction; experimental rockets unpacked; and it was, doubtless, from this choice store, that the specimen which had created such consternation had been selected. Master James was missing; so that it was soon made intelligible to all, *who* they had to thank for the wholesale evening consumption of silks and muslins. It was, indeed, as they had good rea-

son to surmise. The young gentleman, feeling himself aggrieved by his summary expulsion, had invented this little plan for finishing the entertainments with fire-works, and had turned his uncle's ingenuity to account, by a careful selection of his own manufacture for the purpose.

Georgina now became anxious to return home; and the cadet, who appeared quite captivated, had again the good fortune of an opportunity to advance himself in her favour, by immediately proposing to accompany her. As the night was beautiful, and the distance extremely short, they proceeded to Mr. Hopwood's house on foot, the major escorting Agnes, and the cadet loitering in the rear with Georgina, from whose extreme simplicity and artless manner he expected a very easy conquest. He endeavoured to amuse her on the road home by a brilliant description of the Woolwich balls, the gay life of an officer, and particularly of his lady, if he should be married.

"Ah, my dear Miss Hopwood, if you did but know the charm of a military life," said the cadet.

"It must, indeed, be delightful," replied Georgina.

"If your papa would allow you to come to our balls, I could procure your family tickets," suggested Mr. Hervey.

"It would be quite impossible," said Georgina; "my papa does not allow me to go anywhere."

"What a pity!" sighed the Woolwich student; "you would be so delighted with our band. Do you know, a young lady eloped from our last ball, with Captain Griggs. She was rather too much confined at home, poor girl, and chose that way to emancipate herself."

"How charming!" cried Georgina; "what a romantic exploit. And was Captain Griggs handsome?"

"Particularly so," said the cadet; "we are supposed to have the handsomest set of officers

in the service;" and here the young gentleman slightly raised one side of his shirt-collar, and smoothed his incipient whiskers. "If you could but come on a visit to town," hinted the cadet, in continuation.

"There is not the slightest chance of it," said Georgina, "unless I were to elope, as the young lady did at the ball; but then, you know, I have no Captain Griggs," she added, laughing.

"Your charms might command the world!" exclaimed the gallant cadet; "but doubtless your parents will shortly introduce you, and I hope then to have the honour of meeting you in society."

"You will wait some time," said Georgina; "for my papa says he shall have no parties for years yet."

"That is cruel!" sighed the lover.

"But here we are," said Georgina, interrupting the slight musing to which her last intimation had given rise. The cadet started at the

unwelcome truth, and the major having rung the bell, he had no opportunity of urging another sentence, but taking his leave of the young ladies, with his uncle, retraced his steps towards Egham.

For a few minutes, however, he allowed the major to proceed alone, whilst he made a rapid but minute survey of the premises. So particular, indeed, was his observation, that had the new police been in that neighbourhood, some unworthy suspicions might have been created as to his ulterior projects. What they were, we may perhaps see hereafter.

CHAPTER VIII.

" O 'tis a parlous boy ;
Bold, quick, ingenious, forward, capable."

" They did beguile in pleasant talk
The weary hour away."

TIME, which operates alike upon peer and peasant, high and low, rich and poor—which dispenses beauty to the ruin, and, *en revanche*, makes a ruin of beauty—had not, amid his multifarious avocations, overlooked the exemplary Jack Jeffries,—who, in company with his former companion, and present friend, Mr. Jabez Hunsman, at this moment occupied a portion of the roof of the Egham stage.

Twelve years had done their work—and sad work they made of it—on the features and per-

son of that individual, who, now become "John Jeffries, Gent. one, &c.," might justly pride himself upon his condescension in accepting the invitation of his friend to partake, in the lower apartments, of the hospitable festivities of Mrs. Maxwell.

A great change had, indeed, taken place in the *tout ensemble* of Mr. Jeffries. The pinched-up features of twelve years ago time had contrived to screw up into almost immoveable rigidity—the smirking expression of the mouth had matured into an eager grin—the eye was subdued but prowling,—and the glossy hair of former days was now not unlike the hide of that animal whose grease once contributed to its beauty. His clothes, however, were of an improved cut and quality; his shirt was unexceptionable, and his stock cheap at one-and-six, and "the last new pattern."

And yet, in the mental and moral departments, the inner man of Mr. John Jeffries had varied but little. The incitements, the motives,

the instincts of his youth had, indeed, expanded with his circumstances, but they were, nevertheless, the same; and making allowance for the difference of manner which a few years commonly superinduce, Mr. John Jeffries, of the present time, was pretty much the same Jack Jeffries whom we took occasion to introduce at an early stage of this history.

When we last presented this gentleman to the reader it will be recollected that he was engaged in the culpable but interesting employment of eaves-dropping; and although it is said, and truly, that listeners "seldom hear much good of themselves," yet, in this instance, Jeffries contrived to hear so much evil of others, as fully to compensate him for his disappointment, could he have felt any, in not falsifying the proverb.

Ambition may be admitted to be the common weakness of us all, nor was Jack exempt from that failing or feeling; for having remained, for some eight years, in the capacity of head-

clerk to Mr. Robinson, something stirred within him, prompting an immediate dissolution of the engagement so long subsisting between them. In Mr. Robinson, it is true, he had seen something to admire, not a little to applaud, and much to imitate; but it is only natural that a due consciousness of his own powers should have begotten a wish to emulate his master, in a path of life upon which that gentleman appeared to be trudging to so profitable a purpose. Mr. Jeffries accordingly found himself one evening in the presence of Mr. Robinson, to whom, without much unnecessary ceremony, he imparted the resolution to which he had come; requesting, at the same time, a *douceur* of sufficient amount to discharge certain fees preliminary to independent practice, and to enable him to commence his professional career in a manner befitting his pretensions.

Now, Mr. Robinson was a gifted, but by no means a giving man. He was surprised—astonished—shocked. "Good God! Mr. Jeffries,

what *can* you mean? how *can* you think?—you are mad surely? how *dare* you presume to request?" with other and similar interrogatory fragments.

But Mr. Jeffries could mean something—had his thoughts about him—was certainly not mad—and did presume to request; or rather, finding the money "no come," and the request "no go," put himself upon another tack instantly.

He whispered something into Robinson's ear, which, at a former period, had been wafted through a certain perforation into his own. We have all heard of "whispering a soft tale in a lady's ear," and can imagine the sensation caused by such tender avowal; but the tale whispered into the ear of Mr. Robinson created a far greater sensation, and it need scarcely be added, of a very different nature. In a word, he acceded to the moderate demand of "his worthy friend," Jeffries—a man whom he had always respected—whose talents he esteemed so

highly—and who had been, for many years, so excellent an assistant; and, in a short time, a handsome brass-plate, whereon was inscribed "Mr. Jeffries, solicitor," adorned the door of a neat house in May's buildings.

It cannot be deemed a remarkable circumstance, that a man of talent like Mr. Jeffries should, in a short time, have established his reputation as a "sharp practitioner," and that by constantly suing for costs rather than for his client, he obtained a speedy accession to his income;—but it was considered by his friends a very extraordinary proceeding, when they learned suddenly that he had taken to his bosom a lady who had sworn to "love, honour, and obey" him; a surprise that was somewhat mitigated by their subsequent knowledge of the fact, that Mrs. Jeffries considered these as merely verbal obligations—the good lady herself plainly stating that the first two she could not, and the last she would not, fulfil.

Whether this conduct on the part of his wife

preyed on the mind of Mr. Jeffries, or that Mr. Jeffries had a mind to prey upon other people, is a problem that has never been satisfactorily solved. It is certain that, about this time, the worthy solicitor performed sundry financial feats, which a censorious and ill-judging world *would* conspire to believe improper and altogether "not the thing,"—in consequence of which he lost caste in the professional world, only escaped from being struck off the rolls, and became considerably reduced in circumstances. Even his revered and correct father-in-law threatened "not to leave him a farthing;" but dying shortly afterwards in a state of utter insolvency, Mr. Jeffries had the mournful satisfaction of knowing and feeling that, however true the menace, the old gentleman harboured, in all probability, no inhuman and indecent hostility to him.

In this deplorable plight of almost utter insolvency, an association of ideas suggested to Mr. Jeffries the expediency of confining his

practice, for the future, to the Insolvent Court —in which small sphere he contrived to scrape together that indeterminate amount of income, which permits a man to get drunk as often as he chooses, to maintain a slatternly wife in beef-steaks and onions and a private dram bottle, and to keep four children in that state which is best described by the oft-quoted adjectives, "fat, ragged, and saucy."

In agreeable talk, relieved by pints of ale whenever the coach stopped, our two excellent friends beguiled the distance between the metropolis and the King's Head at Egham, at which inn they proposed to spend an hour previous to making their appearance at "the House," which was but a short mile's walk from that place of entertainment.

"Come, cheer up, don't be down upon your luck, Jeff," said his companion, giving the other a nudge which well nigh, as Hunsman wittily observed, "knocked him off his perch"—"what's the matter? you don't talk."

"I was thinking," said Jeffries, "what a queer start that marriage was between Maxwell and Mrs. Miltoune."

"Wasn't it?" said Jabez:—"and how cleverly you got him through afterwards. That's a benevolent act, Jeff. I don't know but I may come the Portugal Street move myself one of these days. Require much stiff, eh?"

"That depends altogether on the number of victims—there's nothing like a good, handsome-looking schedule," replied Jeffries—"sure to be sent back under a dozen creditors—nothing like laying it on thick."

"I'm the man that can do that same," cried Jabez;—"whenever I say to myself, Hunsman, mind you, there's a fellow to be done, I do him brown as the devil's nutting bag;—there's no mistake about me—I'm a regular ——

"Well, but what sort of a gentleman does Maxwell make," cried Jeffries, interrupting the self-complacent speech of the other ere it became, as it usually did when Hunsman lighted

upon that topic, somewhat tediously prolix,—"does he carry himself respectably?"

"Why, pretty well, thank'ee," replied Hunsman; "she does'nt allow him to be seen above stairs very often."

"Only when she plays the quiet domestic character for the purpose of catching flats, I suppose?"

"'Xactly, you've hit it, Jeff," said Jabez, with a grin. "There he sits and says nothing, by the fireside, looking straight down his nose, and rubbing his hands over and over, with an occasional 'hem,' and a hitch at his cravat, just like some of the old respectable gentlemen at the west end."

"That's the way to do it," said Jeffries.

"I b'lieve you," cried Jabez—"but, lord! below stairs he's quite a different character; fond of a drop, to be sure; and he *will* come it strong sometimes before the servants, as it's right he should; but he and I are the best friends going."

"And only proper you should;" you've been a good friend to him, Hunsman."

"You may say that, Jeff," cried the other; "I was the making of him. But, lord bless you, if it hadn't been for Bess, I'd have had her myself," and he winked his eye knowingly.

"You would? Her! her?"—and Jeffries treated his cheeks to a chuckle. "*You?* Well, that beats all."

"Wouldn't I, though?" cried Hunsman with warmth, "where's the joke? Arn't I as respectable looking an individual as here and there you'll find one; a precious sight more likely chap than a butler out of place, I'm thinking. And I say, master Jeffries, if you hadn't been in such a plaguy hurry to marry your missus (and that was no great catch, it strikes me), I'd have said a good word for you in that quarter."

"I can speak for myself, when it concerns

my interest to do so," observed Jeffries, with calm dignity.

"Oh yes, you know your own interest, *you* do?" cried the other; "especially in marriage cases. I say, friend Jeff, didn't old Curtis let you in sweetly in that business, eh? Lots of blunt you touched upon that occasion, I don't think — three per cents. in the Bank — Long Annuities—snug freehold in Surrey. Ha! ha! Oh, the old sinner!"

"The state of Mr. Curtis's affairs were well known to me long before I married his daughter," cried Jeffries, slightly disconcerted.

"Ho! ho! they were, were they?" retorted the other. "Then why did you marry the woman?"

"Why," said the lawyer, after some hesitation. "Why? for love, to be sure."

"Gammon!" said Hunsman.

"Honour!"

"Walker!"

"Well, but don't you see——"

"I do," interrupted the other, and with a pleasantry peculiarly his own, he took what is expressively termed "a sight" at his companion.

Mr. John Jeffries was concocting in his ruffled mind a befitting reply to this unwarrantable outrage upon his domestic affections, and was about to give vent to his feelings in an overwhelming burst of indignant oratory, when the coach made a sudden stop at the door of the King's Head.

"Well, here we are at last, Jack," cried his friend. "Step down quickly, my lad—I'm as cold as charity in the bosom of a lawyer."

"I shall undoubtedly get off the roof of this coach," cried Jeffries, as he descended; "but it will only be to climb upon the roof of another. I'll not go a step further with a man who doubts the sincerity of my feelings as regards Mrs. J.—Coachman, what's your fare?" And here the insulted and sensitive lawyer

plunged his hand into his pocket, with as much energy as if he were really about to draw forth his purse.

"No, d—n that," said Hunsman, interposing; "this is my treat; you shall stand next time;" and pushing his companion out of the way, with all that urbane courtesy which distinguishes people who are bent upon what is called "standing Sam," the liberal Jabez disbursed the amount of the fare into the hands of the coachman.

"What a techy fool you are," said he, as he seized the arm of the other, and lugged him towards the door of the inn. "I didn't mean to offend you: I thought you were too old a bird to be caught with chaff."

"Why, if you meant it as chaff——"

"To be sure, I did," said Jabez earnestly. "Dy'e think I suppose you're without the feelings of a man? You're not a brute beast, Jack, are you?"

"I hope not."

"Well, then——"

Appeased by this eloquent explanation, the zoological conclusion of which appeared to be particularly gratifying, the amiable Jack permitted himself to be escorted to the coffee-room.

Four gentlemen were seated in the respectable parlour of the King's Head as the re-united friends entered, who began to look upon the new comers, and then at each other, with that sort of silent speculative expression which implies a doubt whether strangers are permitted entrance; the awkward circumstance of a public room not being a private one seasonably occurring to memory, and preventing any audible manifestation of displeasure.

During the pause that followed, and while the waiter was employed in procuring their "cold without," Jeffries and his companion had full leisure to contemplate the personal points of the four taciturn gentlemen.

The most imposing of these was Mr. Gray-

ling, a retired city fishmonger, reputed wealthy, and living in the immediate neighbourhood. He was seated in a conspicuous part of the room, in an arm chair, made purposely for him; lest his inordinate weight should cause its more fragile brethren to crash like reeds beneath its intolerable pressure. A benevolent expression pervaded that small portion of the centre of his face in which his features might be said to be comprised—all the rest consisting of two very immense cheeks, and three or four chins. He was busily engaged in smoking—a duty, as it seemed, of almost sacred obligation—for he kept his eye constantly fixed upon the bowl of his pipe, and at intervals slowly protruded his short-looking arm, and with a fanciful tobacco-stopper kept the weed in a state of proper coherence.

Nearly opposite to him, and erect as his own principles, sat Mr. Clarencieux, a private gentleman of the neighbourhood.

Extremes, it is said, sometimes meet, and in

this instance they had done so; for certainly never were two intimate friends, the one so fat, and the other so lean, as Mr. Grayling and Mr. Clarencieux. This latter gentleman was habited in grey pantaloons and black gaiters, wore a blue coat buttoned close up to his chin, and rejoiced in a skull of such utter desertion of hair, and smoothness of surface, as to convey the idea of its being polished by the housemaid every morning with the furniture. In public company Mr. Clarencieux delighted to exhibit his acquaintance with the Red Book and Burke's Peerage; and a private source of gratification to him was, the conviction that he bore a considerable resemblance to Earl Grey, whose contour and expression he sedulously studied, and committed to memory and practice, as portraits of that nobleman successively made their appearance in the print shops.

The other two gentlemen, who sat, so to speak, "cheek by jowl," were partners, Messrs. Mottram and Sniggles, the surveyors, both re-

sident at Egham, in the same house, inseparable companions and bosom friends. The former of these was a person of the middle size, and about the average circumference. He had coarse light hair parted in the middle, and brought round on either side into a stiff curl, not unlike a small ram's horn; and a face reminding you of the visage of the king of hearts,—more especially when its owner turned his eyes leeringly towards his loquacious partner. As for Mr. Sniggles, he was one of those minute persons who are said to be compelled to employ a stool when they would look over the fender; with a head scarcely bigger than that of a sparrow, and legs which, when clothed in white gaiters, suggested tobacco-pipes. Whether it was that this gentleman constantly wore a green coat, or that his unvarying vivacity invited such an application, we know not; but amongst his familiar acquaintance he was known by the style and title of "Grasshopper Sniggles."

And now, having, with all due ceremony in-

troduced to the reader the four respectable gentlemen who, with some others, constantly frequented the parlour of the King's Head, it may be sufficient to mention, that the ice of their reserve gradually thawed, and that a conversation was begun which will be found in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

" They'll sit by the fire, and presume to know
What's done i' the Capitol; who's like to rise,
Who thrives, and who declines: side factions, and give out
Conjectural marriages."

" We'll tell thee something of this history."

" And so you think these people no better than they should be," inquired Mottram of Mr. Clarencieux, as, having emptied his glass, he leisurely devoured the thin slice of soddened lemon-peel, whose acid properties had been long ago extracted.

" I beg pardon—let me not be misunderstood," returned that punctilious person; " I by no means intended to convey the slightest suspicion of their respectability. I am sure I should be the last man in the world—it never

entered my mind—I would not, on any account —I only thought their class of acquaintance a little extraordinary."

"Why, who goes to see them? None in this neighbourhood, I believe," said Mottram.

"I cannot satisfactorily answer that question," said Clarencieux. "The major, I fancy —I don't know—I won't be positive—may have presented himself at Beverley House. Do you happen to know, Mr. Grayling, whether Major Caisson visits at Beverley House?"

"Can't say I do, upon my word and honour," said the fat gentleman, unrolling a mouse-skin tobacco pouch, from which he slowly replenished his pipe.

"You have never paid your respects there, Mr. Grayling?"

"Don't go nowhere—it's hard work to get about now-a-days, upon my life," said Grayling, extinguishing the pipe-light with the foot of his glass.

"Mr. Grayling's circle of acquaintance is

very small," said Sniggles, "and yet he has a very large round," and he glanced at the portentous paunch of the other.

"Don't, Sniggles," and his partner cast an oblique gaze of delight towards him.

"Will, Mottram," and the two accomplished a simultaneous laugh.

"And yet," resumed Mr. Clarencieux, "if Mr. Maxwell belongs to the Maxwells of the North—a most respectable family—who have been so long seated at——let me see: God bless me; very odd I should forget. Umph! ridiculous quite."

"Talking of the old 'un," remarked Jabez to his friend, in an under tone, while Mr. Clarencieux was scratching the back of his ear, and endeavouring to recall the name of the locality of the Maxwell estate.

Jeffries answered by a kick of the shins.

"However," resumed Clarencieux, "there was a Maxwell who returned from India, many years ago, very rich—an immense fortune—such

a fortune as people made in those days. He stood for a large borough in the west of England: it cost him thirty thousand pounds, for he bribed every voter but one, who gave a plumper to his opponent, Sir Paul Shrimpton. Sir Paul petitioned the House, and the election was declared invalid. Well, when the Speaker arose, and requested Mr. Maxwell to retire, since he was no longer an honourable member, he walked slowly out of the House, without making the accustomed obeisance, was seen to stagger about in the lobby, made towards the Vote-office, knocked his head once—only once —against the door-post, and dropped down a corpse."

"Pretty tough story, that," said Hunsman, in an under tone.

"I can't swallow it," answered Jeffries, in the same key.

"I suppose," remarked Sniggles, "there was a *post*-mortem examination of the body. How came the post to enter his head, I wonder;

and I wonder whether his head entered the post."

"Don't be a fool, Sniggles," cried Mottram, with the customary glance.

"Can't help it, Mottram," and the laughing duet followed.

"Really, gentlemen," remonstrated Mr. Clarencieux, whose face had by this time assumed a beet-root tint—"this incredulity, I hope, is not intended as an insult; what I have been telling you is a fact. Mr. Grayling, surely you can remember the circumstance?"

"Can't say I do," replied Grayling; "remember nothing now-a-days—upon my soul."

"Why, Mr. Mottram——"

"It happened before my time," said Mottram.

"Now, be candid, Mr. Sniggles."——

"Don't happen to have heard of it."

"Then I appeal to these gentlemen," cried Clarencieux, disturbed not a little by the unanimous obliviousness of his companions.

"I think I have heard tell of it," said Hunsman.

"There," cried Clarencieux, in triumph—"there, Mr. Mottram."

"I certainly remember to have read something about it," said Jeffries.

"Do you hear, Mr. Sniggles?"

While these gentlemen were exchanging explanation, Messrs. Hunsman and Jeffries were imparting to each other their private opinions of the character and pretensions of Mr. Clarencieux.

"Precious old liar," said Jeffries.

"Isn't he?" said Jabez.

"A monstrous bore, I should think," suggested the lawyer.

"All jaw, like a sheep's head," returned Hunsman.

"Well, but, Mr. Clarencieux," said Sniggles, recurring to the topic which had suffered a slight interruption, "what has this Mr. Maxwell to do with that Mr. Maxwell?"

"Why, sir," cried Clarencieux, "I was going on to remark, that this Mr. Maxwell may be the son of that Mr. Maxwell, whom, I may now state, I knew particularly well. If this gentleman be his offspring, I hope he has inherited the dignified demeanour and polished manners of his parent."

"Only think," said Jabez to his friend, "of Maxwell's being the son of a rich East India nabob. Why, Jeff, his father was a killer of pigs, and died in the workhouse; and Bob was brought up as a pot-boy to the Red Bull at Puckeridge."

"I can only say," remarked Mottram, in answer to the surmise of Mr. Clarencieux, "that it's very unlikely that this man is the son of the Maxwell you speak of. Why, he's one of the lowest fellows in this neighbourhood."

"Yes, but," interrupted Sniggles, "he may be the son of that Maxwell, nevertheless; for

he's pretty often knocking his head against the door-post of the Bald-faced Stag."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Clarencieux, in amazement, "and do you know this gentleman, then?"

"Not we," said Mottram, "but our clerk, Girdlestone, who uses the house, knows him well enough: he's always getting drunk in the back parlour, in company with a vulgar sot named Hunscomb, or Hunsman, or some such name—a kind of half-servant, half-friend."

"Yes, half-and-half, with the chill off," said Sniggles.

"Can't you be quiet, Sniggles?" cried Mottram, with his usual ocular appeal.

"No, Mottram, can't be quiet," returned Sniggles.—"Gentlemen, your very good health,"—and, with an amiable smile, the small surveyor bowed courteously to the strangers.

"Well, sir, and I'll drink *your* very good health,—and be d—— to you," added Hunsman, in an under-tone, as he threw himself

back in his chair, having feasted his eyes upon the two partners with a blood-thirsty earnestness of gaze.

"I say, Jabez," whispered the considerate Jack, "you've got a precious character in this neighbourhood—a vulgar sot, always getting drunk in the hind quarters of the Bald-faced Stag—he! he! he!"

"Don't be a fool, Jack, with your he! he! he! like a cat with the quinsy," retorted Hunsman; "it's another of their lies; we never takes more than 'll do us good;" and he rang the bell for a fresh supply of "cold without."

At this instant, Major Caisson entered the room, and was greeted by the four gentlemen with much cordiality.

"Well, major, what news this evening?" demanded Mr. Clarencieux, when the other had taken his seat.

"None, that I am aware of," answered the major, "except, indeed, the grand party this evening at the Maxwell's may be called so."

"Well, that is *very* extraordinary;—I was never apprised of it," said Clarencieux with an air, as if printed notices of such proceedings were usually left at his lodgings for approval.

"Oh! these things are so common now-a-days," said the major, "that they can hardly be called news."

"What most astonishes me," said Clarencieux, "is, that no ladies visit at Beverley House. Do *you* visit the Maxwells, major?"

"I do not," said the major. "A young lady, the daughter of Mrs. Maxwell by her first husband, Miss Agnes Graham, has sometimes honoured us with a visit, in company with Miss Hopwood; but I am not acquainted with the family. By-the-bye, has Hopwood been here this evening?"

"Talk of the devil," said Sniggles, "here he comes," as Mr. Hopwood, with unaccustomed erectness of figure, stalked into the room.

A general manifestation of that kind of respect which is invariably paid to the representative of wealth, followed this announcement.

"Ha! Hopwood," said the major, "and how is it we have not seen you these two nights? Have you been ill? What's the matter?"

"I am not unwell," said Hopwood, with a dignified reserve proper to the place, and, perhaps, to the occasion, "but I have been a little put out of my way, by hearing that the carriage of my friend Lord Walgrave stopped here only a few minutes ago, and that I came too late to pay my respects to my young friend."

"I'm blessed if we haven't missed a chance of a lift," said Hunsman to his companion; "we might have got up behind—the young lord is going to the house."

"Never mind," said Jeffries, who was now beginning to apply himself to his grog with

affectionate ardour, "we can toddle along comfortably enough presently."

"Lord Walgrave, I presume," said Clarencieux, "is one of the party at the Maxwells."

"Doubtless," replied Hopwood, applying his handkerchief to his nose as none but rich men are privileged to do—"I had thought of seeing his lordship at *my* house before this."

"Indeed!" said Clarencieux—"a young nobleman of large fortune, I believe: a snug sinecure, and a very pretty estate in Hertfordshire. I know his father, the earl. Let me see—the ancestor of the Walgrave family, Hugh de Walgrave, came in with William the Norman, and had his head cloven in twain by Harold at the battle of Hastings. The arms are, I think, two tigers rampant, the motto, '*Quem Deus vult perdere.*' Am I right, Mr. Hopwood?"

"I have never noticed the crest," said Hopwood, carelessly, "and yet I have many of Lord Walgrave's letters in my possession. Are you going towards home, major?"

"I am for you," said that military gentleman, as he emptied his glass. "I shall be expected at home."

"And I," said Hopwood. "Good evening, gentlemen;" and with an unusual majesty of demeanour did Hopwood, followed by his more urbane friend, vacate the parlour of the King's Head.

"Hopwood doesn't seem the thing to-night," remarked Mottram.

"Yes, he left rather suddenly," said Sniggles. "I don't think he comes quite so often as he used to do. Getting up in the world, I suppose."

"Perhaps so," said Clarencieux. "Indeed, I have remarked a slight alteration in his manners of late. Keeping company with nobility, gentlemen, spoils a man for respectable society. Is not that your opinion, Mr. Grayling?"

"Can't say—upon my soul,"—would most probably have been the answer of Grayling,

had not the above gentleman some time previously, to speak poetically, resigned himself to the arms of Morpheus; if, indeed, that drowsy god could, even by a poetical fiction, be imagined capable of encircling so huge a rotundity.

"Fat gentleman gone to the land of Nod," said Jeffries, putting his oar into the stream of conversation.

"So it should seem, sir," said Mr. Clarencieux, with a sort of affable stiffness. "But here is his boy, come to take him home. Walk in, Thomas."

"Now, Thomas, whip him up, and away with him," said Sniggles, as the boy laid his paw upon the shoulder of his master, and began to shake him with rustic energy.

"Lord love you, Mr. Sniggles," said the boy, grinning; "master's a 'nation sight too much for I to manage. Here, master, missus says she can't wait no longer—the tripe 'll be done to death."

This culinary intelligence had the desired effect of recalling the old gentleman to this waking world; who now, having got himself upon his legs, placed his immense beaver upon his head, and propped by his sturdy attendant, slowly betook himself to his home.

"Gargle hasn't been here lately," said Mottram, after a pause.

"No," returned Clarencieux, as he carefully selected a sixpence from his purse, and applied to his coat pocket for a penny for the waiter. "No, he's too busy. Almost always at the lodge, in attendance upon Mrs. Vernon. That old lady is, I fear, dying."

"A fine specimen of antiquity that," said Sniggles.

"Remarkably so," said Clarencieux; "and the two daughters, charming girls."

"That's another extraordinary thing," said Mottram; "Mr. Vernon, the son, visits the Maxwells frequently, but the ladies have never yet been known even to make a morning call."

"Is that Vernon the rich banker?" hiccupped Jeffries, upon whom the "cold without" had worked its usual effect.

"Don't interrupt conversation," said Hunsman; "you're a fool, Jack. I'll be bound you know nothing of the party."

"Don't I though?" cried Jeffries.

"The gentleman is right," said Clarencieux, addressing Hunsman benignly. "Mr. Vernon is a rich banker."

"Who's the fool now, Jabez," cried the inebriated lawyer.

"A very proud man," resumed Clarencieux turning to the surveyors; "and I should guess not a very amiable one. We did hear, to be sure, of his going to do great things for the poor; but that's dropt. These monied men are usually proud and selfish; and it strikes me he's no better than the rest."

"Hold there," cried Jeffries, laying down his pipe; "you're out there, old 'un. He's a regular trump, and no mistake. I'll tell you:

a client of mine had been two years in White-cross-street for a debt he never owed, but which, mind you, he was compelled to pay; for a man can't take the benefit more than three times, and he had done that, you understand. Well, he hadn't a blessed *mag*, and had to keep a wife and thirteen children out of it."

"Draw it mild," interrupted Hunsman—"thirteen children!—a baker's dozen of kids!—that's a stretcher, Jeff, any how."

"Honour bright," said Jeffries. "Why, there were eleven without the two babbies in arms—twins; and what do you call them but thirteen?"

"Well, go on," said Hunsman; "cut it short."

"At last he thought of applying to this Vernon," continued Jeffries, "whose clerk he had been some years before; and I waited on my gentleman. Be hanged if he didn't come and see the prisoner the very next morning, tipped up a fifty, and no mistake; afterwards

got him a place in the Excise, put two of the boys into the Marine School, and gave all his washing to the wife."

"That is indeed an amiable trait," said Clarencieux, "a most remarkable instance of generosity. Here, waiter, take for my glass of gin-and-water, and here's a penny for yourself. —Good night, gentlemen."

The rising of Mr. Clarencieux was the occasion of a similar movement on the part of the two surveyors, and of our worthy companions, who, with many blaspheming comments on the unaccountable lateness of the hour, pushed on towards Englefield Green; the fuddled solicitor describing in his progress such curves, zigzags, and acute angles, as gentlemen when "glorious" commonly contrive to exhibit, and to which, to say the truth, Mr. John Jeffries was very much addicted.

CHAPTER X.

"You thief of love! what, have you come by night?"

"Ah me! for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth."

We left our sentimental cadet, after a close examination of Mr. Hopwood's premises, following his uncle on the road home. He speedily overtook him, and found the major, as usual, absorbed in his own mysteries. For some time they walked together in silence, each seeming intent on his own speculations.

"It seems practicable," said the cadet, in a musing tone of voice.

"*Seems* practicable!" repeated the major, applying the remark to the subject which ex-

clusively occupied his thoughts, "I will stake my professional reputation on its practicability."

"I was thinking of Miss Hopwood, uncle," calmly rejoined the cadet, who perfectly well knew what was passing in the major's mind.

"Psha! you are always thinking of Miss Hopwood," returned the disappointed cannoneer.

"Not exactly always," said the cadet, "this evening having been the first time I have had the pleasure of seeing her."

"It was but yesterday that Miss What-d'ye-call-her was an angel," continued the senior.

"Miss who?" inquired the young gentleman.

"Oh, you know perfectly well; Mrs. What's-her-name's daughter, on the Green."

"Miss Graham; ah, but she has no sentiment; whilst her friend, the divine—"

"No fiddlestick!" interrupted the major, who, though the kindest of men, was very testy

when any other subject interfered with his favourite theory, "what will sentiment do for you, d'ye think, at the Horse-guards? You were a decent, reasonable lad when you first came down here, and I thought of consulting you upon a subject of extreme importance; but, what with one girl or another, your brains are only fit for wadding."

"Sir, I am sorry if I have displeased you," said the cadet; "but you must allow that Miss Hopwood is a charming girl."

"Instead of having Dundas in your hand, which, by the way, is not half so good a study as Gronhausen," continued the veteran; "you are puling over Byron, as if all the poetry in the world can beat the music of a thirty-two pounder!"

"But surely, sir, you will allow one to admire," observed the cadet.

"Admire what? a lad like you has no business to admire anything beyond his studies," retorted the old major; "besides, if it is Miss

Hopwood you are thinking of, I can tell you she is quite out of your range. Her father is an odd sort of old fellow, has strange notions of perfectibility, and, I believe, would enclose his daughter in a glass case, if he could, like my model."

"Well, sir, but I am a gentleman," said the cadet; "and Mr. Hopwood surely could not object to *me*, if I were to propose for his daughter. Indeed, I have reason to believe I am not indifferent to the young lady herself."

"Propose!" echoed the major, indulging in an exhibition of mirth at the idea, most unsuitable to the dignified feelings and pretensions of the Woolwich student; "a boy like you, without a penny! and, young gentleman, were you in a condition to propose, as you call it, I tell you that nothing but a coronet has any chance of Hopwood's consent."

"Oh, I don't fear that," said the young gentleman, with the easy confidence of one whose knowledge of the world extended but little be-

yond the road from London to Woolwich; "secure of the affections of the daughter, it would be easy to obtain the consent of the parent."

"My dear boy," said the major, good-naturedly, "do not be too secure either of one or the other. I do not profess to know much of these matters, but I believe that my new code of signal-rockets will be in general use long before your *proposals* will be recognized by either father or daughter."

"Well, sir, we shall see," rejoined the cadet, in no degree disconcerted by his uncle's opinion of his speculation; but feeling indifferent to any other subject of conversation, the major's efforts to engage him upon the subject of projectiles were utterly unavailing, and in this manner they reached home.

To Agnes the events of the evening were but little satisfactory. It is true that the desertion of her admirer had wounded her pride rather than her feelings; however, it was anything but pleasant to anticipate that the first appear-

ance of Georgina at any future time might be attended with the same result, and she sighed at the thought that it was easier to make a conquest than to keep one. "At this rate," said Agnes to herself, "I must never encourage the attentions of any one, for the moment Georgina comes with her demure, innocent-looking face, I must wear the willow. But I suppose she means no harm." And, with this good-natured reflection, she heartily forgave Georgina, and resigned all claim to the cadet.

When Georgina laid her head upon her pillow she could not sleep, so elated was she with the success of this, her first experiment upon the heart of man; for the dumb weekly flirtation she carried on when at school, with one of the young gentlemen of a neighbouring establishment, who sat in the opposite pew at church, could hardly be considered one. When at that very select seminary, she had, in the usual routine of study, often read of "broken hearts," and "unsuccessful passions,"

which she began to fancy mere invention, so easy did it appear to her to bring to her feet any on whom she set her mind. The poor cadet! how delighted he seemed at a kind glance — an approving smile — and when she allowed her hand to linger but a second in his at parting, how enraptured he was! And she thought if such results arose from such trifling endeavours, what a crowd of prisoners might she not chain to her car had she but the opportunity. "Ah," thought Georgina, as the vision glittered before her, "if my parents are determined to shut me up in this place, and debar me any little innocent recreation, I will find means to amuse myself." And having formed that independent resolution, she fell asleep and dreamt of sky-rockets and cadets.

The summer was waning into autumn; but, as the evenings, though shorter, were still warm and bright, Georgina would frequently saunter in the garden, which was of considerable extent, and thickly planted. She was sometimes ac-

companied by Agnes, and occasionally alone in these home rambles, while her mother was busy arranging some of the details of her establishment, and her father engaged with a friend within, or perhaps in the parlour of the King's Head, discussing local topics with the major, Mr. Clarencieux, or other of his neighbours.

It was on the evening succeeding that of the major's party, that the thrifty Mrs. Hopwood was superintending the making of preserves for her winter display of tarts and puddings — for, though so rich, she rigidly adhered to her duties as housekeeper. The respectable head of the establishment was still detained by his business in town, and Georgina found herself strolling through a long walk of espalier apple-trees, at the extremity of the garden. As she passed the garden-gate, the insecure state of which she had forgotten to mention during the day, she was surprised to find that it had been opened from without, and left, as it is called, a-jar. Not disconcerted by this

suspicious appearance, she quietly pursued her walk, leaving the gate as she found it; sometimes stooping to pick a flower, and every now and then casting a furtive glance around the garden.

Close to the gate was a sort of arbour, or what was originally intended to have been one. The rustic seat, from want of care, had suffered considerable dilapidation; and the clematis, honeysuckle, and other parasitical plants, had formed a wall behind it, by the help of four posts, which had been erected by the original architect to aid his principal design; but, as the Hopwood family were neither horticulturally nor floriculturally disposed, nor, indeed, possessed any taste in landscape gardening, the design of this intended structure was entirely overlooked, and the rustic erection allowed to decay, under the influence of wind and weather. Opposite to this seat was a small stone fountain, which was kept in order by the man who contracted to take care of the garden, because he

found it profitable to rear gold-fish—a speculation which had entirely escaped the calculation of the sagacious Hopwood.

Georgina threw her bonnet upon the crazy bench, and seating herself beside it, soon appeared immersed in thought, whilst gazing on the trickling water-drops dancing and sparkling as they fell. An unusual sound disturbed her from her reverie. It seemed to proceed from behind the leafy screen at her back, and resembled the sigh of a human being. She half turned her head, in the attitude of deep attention, and had it not been that the soft night-breeze played with her clustering ringlets, and her bosom's rise and fall,—with her lips gently apart, and her motionless features, she might have been taken for an exquisite work of art—so still and fair did she look in the radiant moonlight! But, excepting that her respiration was rather quicker than usual, the slight smile which played upon her lip argued no sign of fear, and the smile was so slight, that

it might be doubted whether it was of pleasure or sarcasm.

A slight rustling of the foliage announced more distinctly the immediate vicinity of another person, and the accents, "Divine Georgina!" breathed in a low, soft voice, placed the question beyond further doubt. Georgina caught up her bonnet, and was about to move, when a figure emerged from the concealment of the shrubs, and, in another instant, was kneeling at her feet! It was no other than the sentimental and love-stricken cadet.

"Divine Georgina! pardon the rashness which has betrayed me to this step," he said, in hurried accents, as if he feared the effects of the step he had taken; "but I have no other means of addressing you, and—" but Georgina had hastily put on her bonnet, and drawn her shawl more closely around her, as if preparing to leave the place.

"Nay, my dear Miss Hopwood, do not quit me at this moment," urged the agitated adven-

turer; "I meant neither to alarm nor to offend you: at least do not leave me in anger." Had not the cadet been by far the more alarmed of the two, he would have discovered but little real sign either of fear or displeasure in the countenance of the fair Georgina. But something was due to decorum, and accordingly Georgina answered with becoming reserve:—

"Really, Mr. Hervey, I am both hurt and surprised at your imprudence. How could you have gained admittance here unknown to any one! I declare I never felt so frightened in my life."

"Pardon me, dear Miss Hopwood, for causing you even a moment's uneasiness," sighed the enterprising youth; "but your presence has become as necessary to me as the air I breathe; and when did stone walls offer any impediment to feelings such as mine?"

"Indeed, Mr. Hervey, I can make no reply to such remarks; for I must confess I do not understand their meaning," returned Georgina

with *naïvete;* "and I must wish you good night, as mamma will be surprised at my absence."

"But a few moments more, for I have much to say, and of importance," urged the enamoured cadet.

"Why, Mr. Hervey, what can you possibly have to say to me?" asked Georgina, with the utmost simplicity of manner.

"A thousand things, charming Georgina, if you will but condescend to listen."

"O, I never could stay to hear half; besides, I should be much blamed if it were known."

"Blamed for listening to one, who adores you!—never! None but hearts of stone, dead to all the gentler—the nobler feelings of our nature, could censure you," spouted the impassioned admirer.

"And yet I think if my papa could see me at this moment, he would entertain a different opinion," said Georgina.

"Not if he knew the sincerity of my inten-

tions towards you—the honour, the respect in which I hold you," returned the student; "and I hope it will be my pleasant task to inform him of all."

"What!" exclaimed Georgina; "inform my papa. I would not tell him for the world.',

"Innocent creature!" breathed the cadet to himself, in the full rapture of his heart. "No, loveliest of human beings, I mean to inform him of my love—my devotion to you; to ask permission to visit you. To——"

"But Mr. Hervey," interrupted Georgina, "it was but last evening that you saw me for the first time."

"Which was sufficient to make me your's for ever!" exclaimed the cadet.

"Dear me," said Georgina, naively; "and does it require only so short a space to bind you for such a period! What shall I find to employ you in?"

"There is one employment in which I could never tire," whispered the love-stricken student.

"And what is that?" asked Georgina.

"To teach you to love!"

"Ah, you would have a difficult task," replied Georgina, laughing; "for all my masters say I am very stupid."

"Grant me but the opportunity, beautiful Georgina," said her lover, emphatically;—"and I am sure I shall not make the same complaint."

"Then you have full confidence in your talent," said Georgina, archly.

"I have still greater in the gentle heart of my pupil," said the cadet, becoming more bold in his suit, from the apparent simplicity of his companion.

"It is of no use," said Georgina; "it is impossible that I can love anybody so well as I do my parents, or my monkey Jacko! unless, indeed, you could amuse me as he does, and run up and down a pole, and crack nuts, and make faces!"

"I fear I cannot rival the feats of Jacko,"

said the student, his natural conceit being a little wounded at the idea of so unsavoury a companionship in the mind of his mistress. But attributing it to her almost infantile simplicity, he continued——"But I implore you, charming Georgina, to let me be so much your instructor, that you will learn to bestow on me a portion, be it ever so slight, of your regard,—dare I say it—of your love!"

"Of my love, Mr. Hervey!" exclaimed Georgiana, as if she but half comprehended him; "of what possible service could that be to you?"

"Of most inestimable service, lovely girl: it would make me the happiest of men," sighed her admirer.

"I scarcely understand you," said the artless Georgina.

"Charming simplicity!" uttered the enraptured cadet to himself. "I will explain to you how your love would render me happy," he said. "I would on the instant fly to your

respected father, explain to him the state of our hearts, and claim your hand. Then, my beautiful Georgina, united, we might glide down the stream of life, regardless of the frowns of fate."

"United! what do you mean, marriage? O that would never do. Mamma says I must not think of such things for many years," returned Georgina, quickly. "But tell me, Mr. Hervey, you said at first, when you wished me to stay for a few minutes, that you had something of importance to say to me. I have been all this time dying to know what it is, for I do love a secret." Georgina cast a sly glance from beneath the shade of her bonnet, at the disappointed countenance of her companion, as if she were curious to see the effect.

"Now, Mr. Hervey, don't keep me any longer in suspense," she continued, laughing; "or I shall never love you half so well as Jacko."

"Loveliest of beings," exclaimed the cadet,

determined not to be disheartened at what might appear to be an inauspicious commencement of his suit. "Have I then not been fortunate enough to make myself sufficiently understood? I have but one secret in the world, and that I have already told you—I love, I adore you!" and the disconsolate cadet seized her hand, and sinking upon one knee, in a most picturesque attitude, began to cover it vehemently with kisses.

"Well, Mr. Hervey," said Georgina, pouting, and gently withdrawing her hand, "I thought you were going to tell me something about the accident yesterday evening—whether your aunt's blonde cap was totally spoilt—or if Mr. Clarencieux was determined upon wearing a wig—or that poor dear little Fido was sick with eating plum-cake; and after all you only repeat to me the fine things you have read in plays."

"I swear to you, Miss Hopwood, that what I have said is as sincere as truth can make it,"

energetically exclaimed the mortified young gentleman, finding the extreme simplicity of his companion, charming as it might be at any other time, most unsuitable to the development of his passion. "But if my language is powerless, surely so lovely an evening must have some softening influence on such poetic feelings as I have believed you to possess—as I am sure you do possess. Let nature then speak for me, with her breath of perfume, and her bright golden lights;" and he pointed towards the heavens, with all the dignity and effect of the principal tragedian of a county town; "and hark! as if to aid my appeal, the voice of the nightingale, beautiful Georgina, that always sings of love!"

"O, no, Mr. Hervey," interrupted Georgina, "that is not the nightingale, it is only our housemaid Susan's little blind robin that you hear; it always sings by candle-light. What a shame it is, is it not, Mr. Hervey, to put out poor little birds' eyes to make them sing."

Mr. Hervey seemed quite confounded at this reply to his touching appeal; and had he seen the comic glance which Georgina stole at him, he would have almost forsworn sentiment; as it was, he nearly sunk upon the crazy bench on which Georgina was seated, and muttered some incoherent answers; but was speedily recalled to himself by Georgina preparing to retire.

"Now I really *must* wish you a good evening, Mr. Hervey," she said, adjusting her light shawl; "Susan, or somebody, will certainly be sent to look for me."

"And will you leave me thus," sighed the disconsolate Hervey, bending upon her almost as imploring a look as a despairing debtor would to a Jew attorney.

"Leave you, *how*, Mr. Hervey," asked Georgina, in the most artless tone of surprise. "Dear me, I hope you are not ill?"

"Cruel girl, I am indeed ill—at heart," urged the despairing lover: "Have I not un-

locked, for your ear, the secret of my breast; and I fondly hoped, from one like yourself, of so congenial a spirit to my own, that I should not have sued in vain. Do but tell me, however, that I may not despair; give me some hope!"

"Why, Mr. Hervey," said Georgina, "I could almost fancy that you were talking seriously, if I had not known that you had said all these fine speeches to Agnes."

"Oh! Miss Hopwood, surely, surely you cannot suppose that I have spoken to Miss Graham in the same feeling with which I have addressed you. You cannot believe ——"

"Take care, Mr. Hervey, or you will break down the bench!" interrupted Georgina suddenly, as the student, in the energy of his appeal, had again possessed himself of her hand, and had almost overbalanced himself in the exploit.

"Grant me, then, but some little token, that I may not consider myself wholly indif-

ferent to you," passionately cried the man of sentiment.

"La! Mr. Hervey, what can I give you?" returned Georgina, trying in vain to disengage her hand; "I have nothing but a bodkin-case, and a little gold pin which Agnes gave me; and you know—"

"No, no, these are not the gifts I covet," cried the intrepid wooer, drawing closer to the side of Georgina.

"Now, Mr. Hervey, you must not; I will not be detained," said Georgina, pettishly, as the enterprising cadet encircled her small waist with his left arm, and was gently drawing her towards him.

"But one pressure of those beautiful lips," sighed the lover in a half whisper, as if he were afraid to speak aloud his audacious hope.

"Mr. Hervey! sir! you will affront me! let me go! I insist!" ejaculated Georgina, struggling to free herself from these unexpected ad-

vances; for the cadet deemed it now a point of honour to obtain "the token," as he called it, and was pressing its fulfilment most energetically.

"But one! nay, now, beautiful Georgina!" But his beautiful Georgina was now seriously angry, and made so violent an effort to disengage herself, that the fragile garden-seat was unable to withstand the shock; crack went both the front legs, and down tumbled the crazy bench, with its occupiers, to the ground; Georgina, in the most unpicturesque manner, sprawling across the prostrate man of sentiment.

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed a female voice, pitched in the highest tone of astonishment, and which seemed to proceed from the direction of the garden-gate.

It was but the work of a moment for both parties to regain their erect position. The cadet stood for a moment irresolute; but it was only for a moment, for Georgina most un-

ceremoniously thrust him forward to the gate, towards which, with this additional impulse, he mechanically made his way, and, in the hurry of his egress, nearly upset a figure who was standing at the entrance, apparently as much surprised at the scene, as the cadet himself was at the unexpected interruption. He had scarcely cleared the threshhold, when the gate was slammed behind him, and bolted, and he found himself in the lane outside, face to face with Miss Agnes Graham.

"Really, Mr. Hervey," said Agnes, who was the first to recover herself, "this is, indeed, an unexpected meeting; this is the effect of moonlight and sentiment!"

"And pray, Miss Graham," said the Woolwich student, recovering himself in some degree from this most unexpected *denouement* to his amatory hopes, "and pray what singular chance, may I ask, makes you a wanderer by moonlight, and at this spot too?"

"Oh, that is soon told," replied Agnes. "I

have been to see your aunt this evening, Mr. Hervey, and returning home with the servant, I thought I observed the garden-gate unclosed, and ran down to see, not expecting, I must confess, to witness such strange moonlight gambols."

"Whatever construction you may put upon what you witnessed, Miss Graham, I do assure you it was entirely my own seeking; Miss Hopwood was quite an unintentional party to it," said Mr. Hervey; and placing his hand upon his heart, he added, "and I hope my intentions are above suspicion."

"I do not doubt it, sir," replied Agnes; "and I am quite willing to allow you all the credit of the exploit. I should only advise you on any similar occasion to be a little more circumspect, for had Mr. Hopwood been passing instead of myself, your intentions might have been mistaken. But, to be sure, he is so extremely particular, and has no notion to what lengths sentiment may at times lead a

gentleman. I wish you a very good night, sir."

"One word, more, Miss Graham, if you please," said the cadet, distantly; "you are welcome to the amusement which this little accident may afford you, so far as it concerns me; but I trust you will remember that your friend, Miss Hopwood, may be compromised by any indiscreet mention of her name."

"Oh, do not fear that, Mr. Hervey," said Agnes; "the affair is doubtless of your own planning, and I would not mention Georgina's name for the world. If Mr. Hopwood should hear of it, I don't know what might be the consequence."

"He has heard quite enough — and too much," was repeated in a high key, which was immediately recognized as the voice of the retired jeweller himself, who instantly made his appearance, accompanied by Major Caisson, before the astonished pair. The fact was, that Mr. Hopwood had invited the major home that

evening as they walked from the King's Head; for he felt anxious to communicate to him his rising prospects, which, as a man of good connexions, and of rank in the world, he might be supposed justly to appreciate. Full of these important speculations, he nearly reached his gate, when glancing down the lane, his eye caught two figures apparently in close communion at the garden-gate. The recollection of the forcible entry of the preceding year came full upon him, and supposing he had now a chance of securing the delinquents, he stole noiselessly on the turf, concealed by the deep shadow of a row of elms, which skirted the garden-wall, and arrived just in time to catch the few words in which his own name was repeated. The situation was one of extreme embarrassment for Agnes; with a word she might have explained it; but rather than betray her friend Georgina, she preferred risking the most unpleasant consequences.

"I have heard quite enough," repeated the

usually placid Mr. Hopwood, who seemed now unusually excited—his moral sensitiveness being completely outraged by what appeared to him so flagrant a breach of decorum.—"And Miss Graham, too, whom I have considered so exemplary a young lady—the friend of my innocent girl—I am shocked, disappointed, hurt," and he jerked up his hands, eyes, and shoulders, with the precision of a pasteboard harlequin moved by the ingenious mechanism of a packthread.

"Why, Mr. Hopwood, you are making more of this than occasion justifies," said Mr. Hervey, sharply; "my meeting with Miss Graham was accidental."

"An odd place for an accidental meeting, sir," said Mr. Hopwood, stiffly; "but it is no affair of mine—certainly not; but—"

"Indeed, Mr. Hopwood, I am not to blame," interrupted Agnes, much hurt at the suspicion which was evidently raised against her; "I was returning home from Mrs. Caisson's when

I met Mr. Hervey, and the servant is now within sight who is waiting for me."

"Come, come, neighbour Hopwood," interposed the good-hearted major, "I see nothing so very remarkable in all this. My nephew meets the young lady, and has something to whisper in her ear, I suppose, and leads her a step out of the road. We have done the same ourselves, I dare say, scores of times."

"Oh, I do not wish to judge harshly, major," said Mr. Hopwood more quietly. "I only mean to say such meetings are imprudent—very; and in this place, too, the abode of innocence!" and he pointed to his daughter's chamber-window. "I do not intend to hurt your feelings, Miss Graham, not in the least; but young ladies cannot be too particular. I would not even hint such a circumstance to my Georgina; in fact, she would scarcely comprehend it; her mind is like a sheet of unsullied writing-paper, thanks to my system of education. But remember, Miss Graham, I

cast no reflections upon you," he continued, seeing the distress of Agnes; "you have merely been a little imprudent—a fault which good advice and example will correct."

"Nephew, you had better go home," interposed the major, willing to close the scene, which was evidently painful to Agnes, particularly as she could not say a word in her own justification without involving her friend; "and say to your aunt, that she must not expect me yet, as I shall see Miss Graham home." The cadet did not stay for a second hint, as his situation was sufficiently awkward, and making a very formal inclination to the parties, he quitted the spot.

"And now, major, I must tell you," said Mr. Hopwood, gravely, the moment the cadet's back was turned, "you have conferred no great benefit to our quiet neighbourhood by the introduction of your two nephews; one is the terror of everybody with his gunpowder freaks, and the other, it seems, would be more danger-

ous still. If I had your leave, I would certainly put that younger scapegrace in the stocks. He laughed in my face the other day when I shook my stick at him, and actually declared he would tie a cracker to my coat tail!"

"You would do me a favour if you would chastise him severely," said the major, who had offered his arm to Agnes, and was proceeding with her and Hopwood into the high road; "but I fear he is incorrigible. I shall send him to sea the first opportunity. The other will speedily return to Woolwich."

Mr. Hopwood had preceded the major a few steps, to ring the bell at his gate, when suddenly a vivid flash of fire was seen for a moment to envelope his legs, which was immediately succeeded by a report like that of a pistol. The good gentleman vaulted from the ground as if he had received the shock of a galvanic battery, and some missile was seen whirling around and about him, as if directed by an unseen hand, occasionally striking him

in its eccentric evolutions, on the face, head, and shoulders, accompanied by a succession of deafening reports, and a shower of fire.

Agnes was alarmed beyond expression, whilst the major, without knowing, or even thinking of the cause of so extraordinary and serious an accident, rushed to his assistance, and, if possible, to relieve him from so formidable an adversary. On his approach, however, he was struck such a violent blow in the face, that he staggered back to the palings for support; whilst the persecuted Hopwood, holding the gate fast with one hand, was ringing at the bell violently with the other, his head tucked in between his shoulders, to avoid as much as possible the assaults of his unknown enemy—screaming "Fire!" and "Murder!" at the top of his voice, and stamping his feet upon the ground, like a maniac, from fear and pain.

Such was Mr. Hopwood's energetic appeal to the bell-pull, that a few seconds had hardly elapsed, before the door opened, and Mrs. Hop-

wood, and Susan the housemaid appeared, preceded by a long-legged boy in a pepper and salt coloured jacket, a white face and carrotty hair, and armed with a kitchen-poker of most formidable dimensions. Just at that time the fiery persecutor appeared to have exhausted its rage; for, striking Hopwood on the knuckles so violently as to cause him to wring his hand with the pain, it ceased altogether.

Great was the astonishment of the inmates of the lodge, at beholding their master in this strange plight, and, to them, without any perceptible cause. Assisted by the major, Mr. Hopwood made his way into his comfortable, well-furnished parlour, and swallowed a glass of brandy to recall his wandering faculties. And then it was that the major solved this most mysterious riddle, in answer to the thousand questions put to him by an anxious wife and curious household. He observed something lying upon the sofa on which Mr. Hopwood had placed himself, and taking it in his hand,

it proved to be the remains of an enormous cracker, secured by a string, which was traced to the skirt of Mr. Hopwood's coat, to which it was securely fastened.

Of course they were at no loss in guessing the author of this ingenious piece of mischief, which was doubtless effected during the parley at the garden-gate. Indeed, Agnes might have placed the matter beyond a doubt; for, as she stood an affrighted but quiet spectator of the proceedings, she saw the major's urchin nephew standing behind the low hedge on the opposite side of the road, throwing his cap in the air, and laughing and yelling with the most demoniac delight during the period of poor Mr. Hopwood's greatest perturbation. He had evidently been at some pains to accomplish his threatened purpose, as hinted at by the unsuspecting Hopwood, on the departure of the cadet.

When the cause of all this uproar was brought to light and explained by the major, each seemed to consider it a duty to add some-

thing by way of indignation and reproach to the unworthy author of such an outrage.

"And to think of his daring to do such a thing to such a man as Mr. Hopwood!" exclaimed Mrs. Hopwood, with elevated eyebrows, and a wondering look, as if such an unparalleled act of audacity was quite beyond her comprehension.

"Oh, la! mem," cried Susan, "I do believe he dare do anything; it was but the other day that poor old Mrs. Grimes had just stepped in with some new milk for Mrs. Sniggles' children at Egham, when what does he do but tie one of them nasty things to the cow's tail, and off the poor thing scampers down the street like mad, and Mrs. Dawkins's little girl, as keeps the huckster's shop, you know, mem, was crossing at the time with a penn'orth of treacle to make posset for old Mrs. Jinks, as is bedridden, you know, mem, when away goes the poor cow right over her, and breaks the cup all to shivers!" And Susan having communicated

with a most rapid utterance this awful fact, looked aghast at her own narrative.

"Oh, major, major!" ejaculated Mrs. Hopwood, "I never shall be able to endure fireworks again as long as I live. I do hope you will remove that sad boy before something more serious happens."

"Rely upon it he shall not remain here long," answered the major, who had been overlooked in the all-absorbing interest created by the head of the establishment, but who bore the marks of his nephew's exploit more than the victim for whose benefit it was more especially intended. One side of the veteran's face was as awfully begrimed with gunpowder as if he had been working at a two-and-thirty pounder, and one of his whiskers, which, by the way, whether from habit, or from a lingering remnant of military pride of appearance, he still cultivated with some success, had completely vanished.

"And how do you feel now, my dear sir?"

inquired the major, observing that his friend Hopwood's face began gradually to resume its natural appearance, and feeling, perhaps, that the accident might in some degree, though remotely, be attributed to himself, or rather to his pursuits.

"Better, major, better," returned the head of the family, having recovered himself sufficiently to find the use of his tongue; "sad dog, major, that of your's; sad young dog; what's to become of him? He will come to the gallows, depend upon it; pity you did not bring him up to business; the Lord Mayor and Bridewell would have cured his wildness. Your gunpowder, major, has turned his brain; and my coat, too, it is entirely spoilt, I declare," he added, in an altered tone, ruefully handling his singed skirts.

"He shall repent it, Mr. Hopwood, rely on it," returned the major, with as much indignation as his nature would allow him to assume; "he shall go to sea in a collier, if I can find no

other place for him. He shall not remain here, that's positive."

"But where is my dear love, Georgina?" asked the resuscitated parent, as if astonished at not having missed her before. "I am glad she has not witnessed this accident to her father; it would have been too much for her susceptibility."

"Here she is," cried Mrs. Hopwood, who had left the room for a few moments to seek her. "I found the dear child in her own apartment, quite unconscious of what was passing, reading 'Hervey's Meditations.'"

Georgina flew to her father's arms, and inquired about his health with true filial anxiety; but happening to cast her eyes on the major's grotesque physiognomy, she was seized with so violent a fit of coughing that she was obliged on the instant to quit the room, accompanied by Agnes.

"Poor child! she is sensibly affected," remarked the fond father, pathetically; "you see

the happy effects of education, major; but what is the matter with your face? Susan, run for some soap and water; what can it be?"

"Oh, nothing material," answered the major, feeling with his hand, for the first time, the loss he had sustained, and bearing it with the equanimity of a stoic; "merely a few of the sparks, which, it seems, have caught me." And, applying himself to the soap and water, he removed the particular cause of Georgina's extreme sensibility, before she returned to the room.

The respectable head of the Hopwood establishment having now entirely recovered himself, the major and Agnes took their departure, leaving the events of the evening to be discussed in the family circle.

"Remember," said Georgina, as she whispered to Agnes, "not a syllable about the garden-gate! I will tell you all about it another time." Agnes pressed her hand as she left, in token of acquiescence.

"My dear," remarked Mr. Hopwood gravely to his wife, after their daughter had retired, "perhaps it might be as well not to encourage Miss Graham *quite* so much as a companion to our innocent girl."

"Mr. Hopwood!" exclaimed Mrs. Hopwood, in a tone of surprise and inquiry.

"Why, my love, she is more in the world than I like to see young persons," returned Hopwood, apologetically. "Besides, my dear, we know very little of her connexions, and I have views for Georgina of a very different nature—very different," he repeated thoughtfully; "but I am unfit for anything to-night; I will explain to you another time." And regarding his wife with an expression of most mysterious meaning, the virtuous and circumspect Hopwood retired to his pillow, leaving to his better half the task of seeing "all things safe," which was, on ordinary occasions, his own duty.

Mrs. Hopwood gazed wistfully after her re-

tiring spouse, whose hints sounded so strangely to her ear, that, by an extraordinary association of ideas, she thought of Dr. Willis and the wonderful reputation he acquired in regard to persons of an erratic turn of mind, and wondered on whom, now-a-days, his mantle had fallen. She then went to "look after the servants," and close the establishment as early as possible.

CHAPTER XI.

"I've changed my state to better my condition."

"Fill full! Why this is as it should be: here
Is my true realm."

THE reader doubtless will have gathered, out of the discourse of Messrs. Hunsman and Jeffries, as they sat on the roof of the Egham stage, sufficient materials wherewith to raise a suspicion of the course of life pursued by Mrs. Miltoune since the death of the Earl of Charleston. It will be necessary, however, that we should state a little more in full, and yet briefly, the career of that lady during the last twelve years.

Mrs. Miltoune, then, finding the only check upon the free exercise of her talents removed (for the earl had in some measure acted as a restraint upon her naturally volatile disposition), with a sum of three thousand pounds in her pocket, and as many more charms of person as her numerous admirers were pleased to ascribe to her, was resolved to maintain such a standing in society as her various claims seemed to warrant her in assuming.

With this view she made herself mistress of an extensive and costly mansion in Pall-Mall; liquidated her more pressing demands just so far as to enable her to get deeper into her old tradesmen's books, and to whet the appetite of new applicants for the honour of her name in their ledger; and, in a word, went on for a few years swimmingly. Her position in society was equivocal, it is true; but then the world is so censorious, and it is a difficult matter for an unprotected woman to steer clear of calumny and misrepresentation in these, or, indeed, in

any other times. We, at least, will not add to the number of her detractors, but content ourselves with observing that Mrs. Miltoune enjoyed the confidence and friendship of a large circle, chiefly composed—for women are so envious of superior genius—of the male sex.

But this agreeable life was not to last, or rather, it would be better to say, was destined for awhile to be interrupted. It is a sad thing when ladies—more especially ladies of fashion, and other irresistible pretensions—permit their outgoings to bear no reasonable proportion to their incomings; or, to speak in truly financial phrase, when they will insist on a surplus of expenditure over income. It requires no attentive reference to a ready reckoner to show that, in such cases, a *deficit* will invariably be observed. Mrs. Miltoune, however, without being herself a ready reckoner, was one who frequently reckoned upon the "ready," and generally with very good reason for such sort of calculation; but it was not

always applied to such common-place purposes as "paying her way." We do not like to dwell upon such paltry and debasing topics; but historical truth compels us to add that the landlord of the expensive establishment in Pall-Mall was a weak man, and had a strange passion for rent, particularly when it became due, and that it was mere misfortune on the part of Mrs. Miltoune to be the tenant of such a man: added to which, her tradesmen were vulgar men with large families, and with intellects so obscured by traffic, that although able enough to make out their own accounts, they were sorely puzzled to make out the accounts of Mrs. Miltoune, which were at that time rife in the neighbourhood. In a word, these unsentimental dealers and chapmen, instead of applying any longer to the lady, applied to the law. Mr. John Doe, and Mr. Richard Roe, were once more called upon to bear witness to the pecuniary delinquencies of Mrs. Miltoune, and that persecuted and much injured woman felt herself con-

strained, with most unbecoming precipitation, to retire into temporary obscurity.

It was in this dilemma that Mr. Maxwell found favour in her sight. Mr. Maxwell had for many years occupied the comparatively humble, though respectable station of butler in a nobleman's family, but was then a denizen of private life; and having, during his domestic sojourn in good society, acquired a sort of "Brummagem" gentility of appearance, was admirably calculated for a husband of convenience. Mrs. Miltoune, at least, thought so; and why should we doubt her taste, or dispute her feeling? The worthy gentleman himself had no scruple—no objection to the matrimonial arrangement. To use his own words, "he was quite agreeable;" and being a kind of personified passive-verb—which implies suffering—was perfectly content still to endure, so long as he was furnished with the means of existence. Mrs. Miltoune accordingly bestowed upon Mr. Maxwell her hand and her—liabilities; and

that truly philosophical gentleman was sued, pursued, and, after some ingenious skirmishing, was incarcerated after the usual manner of "free-born Britons." In due process of time he invoked the "benefit of the act," and, by the professional acumen of Mr. John Jeffries, was soon permitted to emerge from a small square room in a prison, to his own family circle.

It were, we fear, too delicate a task to endeavour to show to the curious or inquiring reader, the means whereby Mrs. Maxwell obtained the wherewithal to enter upon the mansion at Englefield Green. Let it then be supposed that she possessed a sort of talismatic touch—alchymical lore—an "open sesame" kind of talent, or rather an Aladdin lamp-like genius; and then suppose that the spirit she invoked to accomplish these desirable works appeared in the likeness of a distinguished nobleman, who will readily be known as a diplomatist of first-rate rank—one who has had

the singular good fortune to withstand the shock of kings, of parties, of generations, and, though always in the way, has never yet been overthrown; of such varied talent as to be equally distinguished in a lady's boudoir, or in the closet of the minister; of so ready a pen that it would be difficult to say whether he excelled in a *billet-doux*, or a protocol; of reasoning so persuasive that his purpose would be achieved, whether through the tortuous mazes of policy, or the subtleties of the female mind; a very dragon of watchfulness over the interest and honour of his country, yet the charm of society; and, in all the little amiabilities so peculiarly attractive in private life—those arts, whether natural or acquired, without which no man may hope to obtain any reputation with the sex—the most successful, the most amiable of impostors.

And his tastes, too!—whatever his enemies, political or personal, might say in detraction, there was one which could not be controverted—

his taste for upholstery! And truly, Mrs. Maxwell's mansion at Englefield Green, one would have thought, had been superintended by such a genius; for no appliances were wanting to render it a perfect Elysium. All that could charm the eye; the lady herself, the pictures, plate, bijouterie, the elaborate furniture, the costly hangings, the infinite upholstery, were there—all were there—nothing too much:—to borrow a phrase from the erudite and enraptured Jabez Hunsman, who wished to convey his notion of the perfection of luxury, "they were up to their knees in Brussels carpets." And then the gardens were laid out in the best and most approved taste, and as to the cellar of wines, it was unexceptionable.

The party which Mrs. Maxwell had invited on the evening before adverted to, not being numerous, was of course select; such description being now-a-days invariably applied to any small number of human beings, whether congregated at the mansion of a marquis in

May-fair, or the house of a butcher in Whitechapel. It was, we have said, a select party. There was lolling, half asleep upon a sofa, the Duke of Rockingham—a nobleman, whose sole business in this life seemed to be to dress, to take snuff, and to wait till apoplexy could find leisure to take charge of him. And there was his son and heir, the Marquis of Marigold, a distinguished orator on agricultural distress, a perpetual president of county meetings, a Colonel of Yeomanry who dined with his corps once a year, a zealous friend of farmers who could afford to pay rent, a staunch supporter of the corn-laws and dear bread, and one who, like the unfortunate Maria Antoinette, wondered at the poor being hungry, when "three such nice cakes could be bought for a halfpenny!" Then there was my Lord Walgrave, who has been already introduced to the reader; and Mr. Robinson in his green spectacles, of whose private character and virtues we have heretofore tendered specimens. In addition to

these, was the Honourable Mr. Scampington, a gentleman about thirty years of age, and six feet in height, with a ruddy complexion, and generally wearing a coloured striped cravat, a yellow waistcoat, green riding coat, white cords and top-boots. Tom Scampington was of a race nearly extinct. They flourished about thirty years ago, but have almost vanished with the advent of quadrilles and French cookery. He was one of those who cared for nothing—his debts and the devil not excepted; who could drive anything, from a four-in-hand to the barrow of a dog's meat-man; who could chaunt any thing, from the *buffo* of Lablache to the "take off" of a dustman; who could say anything but his prayers, and do anything—even a lawyer! He knew all the points of a horse, and could doctor it into the bargain; he was a member of the funny club, and the best shot at the Red House, and would run a match with any man in the three kingdoms; he would play at anything, from "put" to "picquet," from "nine-pins" to "*rouge-et-*

noir;" would bet upon anything, and take either side, and would laugh louder, and utter more choice oaths, than any other man in England. To relate all the accomplishments of Mr. Scampington would be an endless task: suffice it to say that, by his side the Admirable Crichton was one of the veriest impostors that ever made a reputation at the expense of a credulous public. There was likewise my Lord Viscount Vauxhall, who was so far indebted to our laws of heirship and succession, that without them he would never have borne a title. His lordship held a commission in a regiment of Lancers, wore small black tips to his lips, had a mincing fashion of speech, and whilst driving his cabriolet up and down Regent-street, with his white-begloved hands peeping over the board, looked like some simpering miss playing the pianoforte. The Honourable Colonel Leonard Hopetoun had joined the select; he was remarkable for nothing beyond his huge black moustache, a good humoured, though stolid set of features, and

driving four grays at the most economical rate of any man about town; the four grays being, to use the horse-fanciers phrase, "screws;" and the entire set out, including the old green barouche, worth about one hundred and twenty pounds.

Then there was Lord Vanely, a celebrated wit and *bon-vivant* about town; and a friend of his, a Mr. Clively, one of that class which pays handsomely for introduction into life, and always have fathers who will do no more for them, and who are totally incapable of doing anything more for themselves. Finally, as a support to the mistress of the mansion, was little Mrs. Hillary, with a turban which seemed to have been born with her, for no one ever remembered to have seen her without it. She was a lady always to be found in such companionship as that of Mrs. Maxwell, who in fact on such occasions as the present, could scarcely do without such a person as Mrs. Hillary—one of those persons whose habitation no one knows, whose means of existence

no one cares to enquire into, and whose husband, if she had any, no human being had ever been known to mention, or even to think of. Mr. Vernon, the rich banker, was expected by Mrs. Maxwell, but had not yet arrived.

Mrs. Maxwell had the good fortune, or rather the talent, to unite under her roof, men of the most opposite opinions, who in the political arena, encountered each other with almost gladiatorial ferocity, but who, in the quiet seclusion of Englefield Green, seemed by common consent to eschew the trammels of party. Under the prudent auspices of Mrs. Maxwell, they were able to indulge in their refined saturnalia; sacrificing for awhile, party hostility to private enjoyment, and feeling safe from the snarling of a meddling world, which seems always to expect its rulers to be either saints or sages.

The apartments were *en-suite*, and sufficiently spacious for a much larger assemblage than were met together on the present occasion. They

were brilliantly lighted, and the furniture, as we have before said, was everything that the most fastidious taste could desire. At the upper extremity of the principal room, on a large sofa lined with large down pillars, was seated the mistress of the mansion. She was dressed in black velvet, which admirably became her well-rounded and matron-like person; her face for this evening, was wreathed with smiles,—for nothing had happened to arouse her natural irritability; all had gone well; her distinguished guests were around her, and unlike other entertainers, she could calculate the cost of entertaining them, as so much to her own individual advantage. Beside her, on the sofa, for form sake, was little Mrs. Hillary, whose insignificant appearance offered some contrast to the *en-bon-point* of her friend, or rather patroness; and on her right was Lord Walgrave, apparently very much at his ease, and talking to her and Colonel Leonard Hopetown, who occupied an ottoman close by. The Marquis of

Marigold was standing under a lamp, and reading his speech at a late county meeting, as reported in the "Bucks Gazette;" for nothing could check his indomitable passion for speechifying on "agricultural distress;" whilst his respected parent the duke was dozing in the corner. Near the entrance were grouped, Lord Vanely, Mr. Scampington, Lord Vauxhall, and Mr. Clively, discussing topics which neither smacked of politics nor literature.

"Did you hear the joke about Hopetown?" enquired Scampington of Lord Vanely.

"I never heard of any joke coupled with Hopetown in my life, unless against him," answered the peer drily.

"Now, Vanely, you are always so d—d sharp upon people, you are upon my soul," lisped Lord Vauxhall; "I have heard him say some remarkably good things."

"I should as soon expect to hear Hopetown say a good thing as you to do one; but what is this joke?"

"Why, you know his team," said Scamping-ton.

"Three roarers and a blind one!"

"Exactly:—Well, driving down Regent-street the other day, rather faster than was prudent with horses which ought to have been in the infirmary, just as his leaders came abreast of old Lady Swanwell's carriage, she almost screamed with affright at the noise, and seizing the arm of her companion, cried out, 'It is a shame that the police allow these nasty steam-engines to come into crowded streets, frightening the horses—we shall certainly have some accident.' It was Hopetown's leaders!" A general laugh followed this anecdote.

"But Vauxhall, somebody told me you were going to join the Carlists in Spain," said Vanely: "Is it true?"

"Why, I have some idea of it," returned the other, "I like the cause, and I think some example should be set, as a matter of principle."

"Ah! then it is as I said," rejoined Vanely,

"I said no man was more likely to volunteer in such a cause than yourself."

"Did you? well I'm much obliged to you for the compliment, upon my soul I am," said Vauxhall, "for you seldom say so civil a thing."

"Why, I could not help saying as much," observed Vanely, "for I know that few men have greater need of the Spanish."

"You are too bad, upon my soul you are," said Vauxhall, colouring slightly on observing the others repressing their mirth at the sally, "but you are always drawing upon somebody for your amusement."

"And I dare swear you would excuse them, if your tradesmen drew upon you from the same fund," returned Avonlay; "but joking aside, you must be a lad of some pluck, to venture on such an expedition, and I give you credit for it."

"But have you calculated on the privations you will necessarily undergo in such a warfare?" asked Mr. Clively.

"Oh, he has been in service," interposed Vanely; "the fatigues of a campaign are nothing new to him; his regiment marched from Manchester to Hounslow in the most inclement season. They said it rained almost the whole way, and several officers fell sick with the measles, from sheer hardships."

"What an extraordinary invention!" exclaimed Vauxhall, who took it seriously; "we suffered from nothing that I recollect, but the execrable wine and the hard beds at inns on the road; but thank God, I am not particular; anything does for me."

"So Walgrave says," returned Vanely; "that you are more easily contented on service than any man he knows."

"Well, that is true—upon my soul it is."

"He says that you came to see him when he was on duty at the Tower, and that though he could only get you a sole, a broiled chicken, and a bottle of claret for your dinner, you bore it without a murmur."

"Well, that is true enough; a man has no right to be particular on such occasions."

"And that you actually bivouacked for the night on a sofa, with only your cloak and some blankets to cover you, and a fire in the room. Nobody can say after that, that you are a feather-bed soldier."

Lord Vauxhall looked at him as if in doubt whether he was bantering or not, but the extreme gravity of Vanely reassured him.

"Well, and you will find that I can do it again;" said Vauxhall decidedly; "if a man embraces the arduous duties of a military life, he must be prepared for such rubs; and as I said before, thank God, I am not particular. But what is the plan for the evening—does any one know?"

"I believe we are to have a rubber," said Scampington; "but they expect somebody else to make up a set."

"Oh, ah, I know," said Vanely, "they are looking for Vernon the banker. I wonder he

is not come, for he is as fond of a rubber as any man in the kingdom."

At this moment the servant announced Mr. Vernon, who was warmly received by Mrs. Maxwell, and by her introduced to Lord Walgrave and the other gentlemen. Lord Vanely he appeared to know slightly, and Mr. Robinson intimately; the latter greeted him with all the respect which he usually paid to rank or wealth.

Mr. Vernon appeared to be about six and thirty years of age, about the middle size, and rather stout. His countenance was prepossessing; there was an air of frankness and good humour about it; but the uncertainty and wavering of his very light grey eye, bespoke irritability and indecision. His complexion was what is usually called sanguine, his teeth were very even and white, and his hair was light and curling, though scanty. An almost imperceptible shade of heightened colour came over his countenance on seeing Walgrave seated in so very familiar a manner beside Mrs. Maxwell; but the feeling

whatever it might have been, was instantly checked. Mrs. Hillary rising under the pretence of conversing with Mr. Robinson, Mrs. Maxwell beckoned the banker into her vacant place.

"I was wondering what had made you so late," said Mrs. Maxwell to Vernon; "we have been waiting to make up a rubber; for Scampington and some of them want hazard, and Lord Walgrave never plays it."

"I shall be glad to make one," said the banker; "for I am not fond of hazard, myself."

"Then we can manage very well," observed the mistress of the house, "for Mr. Clively and Mr. Robinson are both whist players. I shall engage the duke in a game of picquet, and the rest can manage for themselves." Upon this intimation, the parties were soon formed, and on cutting for partners, Lord Walgrave and Mr. Robinson were opposed to the banker and Mr. Clively, at short whist and five pound points.

The duke was soon dozing over a game at picquet with Mrs. Maxwell, and the dice were heard rattling in a distant room. Lord Vanely and the Marquis of Marigold were lounging upon a sofa, in the neighbourhood of the whist players; the marquis had pocketed the Bucks Gazette, and was discussing with Vanely, various points of play, in the mysteries of which, though politician and patriot, he seemed by no means deficient.

Play had now proceeded a considerable time, and refreshments were handed about in profusion. Vernon's face was flushed, and his hand slightly trembled, as he dealt the cards; he had already lost to a considerable amount with Walgrave, by heavy betting. As the wine came round, he drank larger draughts of Champagne, which, instead of allaying his excitement, only tended to increase it.

"Yonder Mr. What-d'ye-call-him, opposite, plays more like a madman than a man of business," said the marquis in an under tone; "such

a fellow as Walgrave would ruin him, if he had the Bank of England to draw upon."

"Yes; he is in very good hands," coolly observed Vanely, "do you observe, what extraordinary good fortune Walgrave has to-night?"

"Vanely, ten pounds upon the odd card this hand," said Walgrave.

"Done!" said Vanely, "and I *am done*,' he added in an under tone.

"He is devilish lucky," said the marquis.

"I'll bet the odds that he turns up an honour this deal," said Vanely.

"Done! in fives or tens?"

"Tens, if you like."

"Done!"

The card was turned up.

"An ace by G—d," said the marquis; "why he has done nothing but cut aces and kings all the evening."

"Yes; he is a remarkably fortunate player," said Vanely, a smile of sarcasm, unobserved by

his companion, rising on his lip:—"I'll make it a standing bet, if you like, for the evening."

"No, no, thank you," replied the other shaking his head; "I don't like betting against luck; I like to back the winning colour. But Vanely, how is it that Walgrave, whenever he deals, is always seized with a fit of coughing? There he is again, almost black in the face, and his hands under the table."

"Does our bet stand?" said Vanely carelessly.

"No, no, thankye; he has it again, by Jove! the king of hearts. It is very singular."

"Very!"

"And he plays up to his partner's hand, as though he knew where every honour was placed."

"Superior tact."

"Egad! I hardly know what to make of it; the devil must be at his elbow."

"I've thought so for some time," muttered Vanely.

"My dear sir, shall we change places, or cut

in for fresh partners?" asked Robinson of the banker, in the most conciliating tone; "luck seems to have set against you."

"No, no, we will remain as we are," returned Vernon abruptly, who, in the true spirit of gambling, seemed to hug his ill fortune.

"I am concerned to see you such a loser," remarked Lord Walgrave courteously; "I really think you had better adopt Mr. Robinson's advice."

"No, my lord, I thank you, fortune must surely turn some time," said Vernon; "we will double our stake on this rubber."

"As you please," said Lord Walgrave.

By this time, the rumour of very high play had brought some from the hazard table. The duke had laid aside his hand at picquet, and was watching the proceedings with some interest, whilst Scampington and others were betting on the points and odd cards.

"Do you know anything of this Vernon?" asked the marquis of Vanely.

"No; I have met him once I believe, but when, I forget. His name is down at Crockford's; that is all I know of him."

"But how came he here? who introduced him?"

"I believe he is a friend of—" nodding towards Mrs. Maxwell, who was standing at the card table, leaning on the arm of the duke, and listening to the interesting prattle of Lord Vauxhall.

"Ah! but does Partington know any thing of him?"

"Between you and me, I believe he neither knows nor cares; I think Partington is getting rather tired of his bargain."

"Likely enough; he has spent a little fortune in the place."

"Which he would be glad to let the banker have at a considerable discount, or I am much mistaken."

"Walgrave is nicking the banker nicely to-night, by G—d," said Scampington in a half

whisper to Vanely, whom he had just approached.

"He has got him *on the nail*," returned Vanely, in a tone of peculiar intelligence.

The Honourable Mr. Scampington hinted that he understood the allusion, by a knowing wink.

The game had now assumed an exciting degree of interest. Both parties were at nine, and it was to decide the rubber, on which was staked between the banker and Walgrave nearly a thousand pounds. It was the nobleman's deal, and, with the cards in his hand, he was again seized with such a violent fit of coughing as to oblige him to bend over the table and drop his hands.

"Marigold, won't you bet again on the turn-up card?" said Vanely, in a whisper.

"Not a maravedi!"

Vanely laughed, and turned to Scampington, making him the same offer he had before made to the marquis. The Honourable Mr.

Scampington most facetiously thrust his tongue into his cheek by way of reply.

"My lord!" said Vernon to Walgrave, in a state of great excitement, which he did not appear able to control, "as we play heavy stakes, I will thank you not to remove the cards from the table."

"Sir, your remark is offensive," said Lord Walgrave, with cold hauteur, whose cough seemed checked on the instant.

"I do not intend it so," returned Vernon, with as much indifference as his temper would allow him; "but I always like to see the cards before me."

"We will speak further on this matter, sir, when this game is decided," said Lord Walgrave, dealing the cards round, and turning up the ace of spades! The marquis looked at Vanely, and the Honourable Tom touched him on the ribs with the point of his forefinger.

The play continued to excite the most intense

interest: not a word was breathed during its progress. The game proceeded equally—each had five tricks. Drops of perspiration stood on Vernon's forehead, and the muscles of his face worked convulsively. Walgrave was rather paler than usual, but his manner was quite composed; not the slightest emotion could be detected in his stoic-like features.

"The man must surely be either drunk or mad," whispered the marquis to Vanely, and looking towards Vernon.

"He is neither the one nor the other," replied Vanely, indifferently; "he is only ruined."

"Not with this night's work, surely?"

"This crowns it."

The parties at the game had now gained six tricks each; another only remained to be played, which, like the seventh charmed bullet, must be fatal to one. Vernon played the eight of diamonds.

"You have lost it, sir," said Walgrave,

playing the deuce of hearts; "my partner must have a better diamond."

"You mistake, my lord," said Clively, playing the nine. "it is our's." Mr. Robinson played the knave of clubs.

"Bravo!" shouted the banker; "thank you, Mr. Clively: a glass of champagne!" one was immediately foaming at his elbow.

"Do not be too hasty, gentlemen," said Lord Walgrave, calmly; "I believe Mr. Clively refused diamonds when he trumped my king; you will find it in the third trick." It was displayed in an instant, and found to be so.

Vernon had raised the glass to his lips, but the wine remained untouched. His face, hitherto painfully flushed, became ashy pale, and, with a desperate and reckless feeling engendered by mental agony, he dashed the glass and its contents on the floor, and then, as if careless as to the place, the company around him, and of consequences altogether, he started upon his feet.

"By G—d!" he cried, looking wildly around him, "by G—d I am in a knot of sharpers!" The sound of every voice seemed hushed as by a spell, the moment the words were uttered. Such a charge, and so conveyed, appeared so monstrous as scarcely to be comprehended. No one seemed inclined to take it to himself by replying.

"My dear Mr. Vernon," said Mr. Robinson, after a short pause of astonishment, but in a voice as soft as a lute, "surely you are acting under some strange misapprehension. You cannot fancy that I could possibly be an intentional party to your losses?"

"No, no, Robinson; I believe you my friend," said Vernon, hurriedly, and taking Robinson's arm for support; "but—"

"Then, sir, I presume I am to take your remark to myself," interposed Lord Walgrave, rising.

"Take it as you please, sir," said Vernon, fiercely.

"Come, come," said Robinson, gently withdrawing the banker to another part of the room, and casting a significant glance towards his lordship;—"pray, sir, calm yourself."

"My God, Vernon, you will certainly ruin me!" exclaimed Mrs. Maxwell, who hastily approached, and in whose countenance anger seemed to struggle with fear. "Say something to Lord Walgrave, as an apology: do, Mr. Robinson, make him say something."

"I shall make no apology. I have said the truth—I am convinced of it."

"Good Heavens! what shall I do? he is mad! he is certainly mad!" cried Mrs. Maxwell, lifting up her hands as if bewildered. At this moment a servant entered, and presented Vernon with a letter, which he mechanically took, and then crushed together in his hand. "Pray, Mr. Robinson, persuade him to do something, or we shall have murder," continued Mrs. Maxwell, "Lord Walgrave will never look over such an insult! O do, Ver-

non, do, for my sake!" and she placed her hand gently on his shoulder, which he shook off with every mark of violent agitation and anger.

"Had you not better see what that note contains?" said Mr. Robinson, disengaging the letter from his hand, and looking at the superscription; "it is from your sister." Vernon seemed to be recalled to himself at the word, and, with a trembling hand, tore it open; but, as he cast a hurried glance over the contents, he let it fall upon the floor, and clasped his forehead with both hands.

"Good God!" he exclaimed; "my poor mother! read it—read it."

Robinson read the note. "You had better lose no time," he said; "go at once." Vernon rose to go, and the solicitor whispered to Mrs. Maxwell—"Make the best you can of it; say he is drunk! mad! anything! I will see him safely out of the house, or, perhaps, home."

"For God's sake return," she said nervously,

"and quickly; I do not know what I shall do.—O my God! that this should have happened!"

Robinson took Vernon's arm as he reached the door, and they left the room together.

CHAPTER XII.

" I feel death rising higher still and higher
Within my bosom; every breath I fetch
Shuts up my life within a shorter compass;
And like the vanishing sound of bells, grows less
And less each pulse, till it be lost in air."

It was in a state of feeling little to be envied that Vernon, followed by the obsequious Mr. Robinson, hastened from the house of Mrs. Maxwell towards his own home. The wine he had drunk, the misunderstanding between Lord Walgrave and himself, which he now began half to suspect was the effect of it, and the sudden, although not altogether unexpected tidings by which the quarrel had been interrupted, tended to accelerate his steps, and, at the same time, to increase the anxiety and reluctance with which he was about to meet a

trial which had been long foreseen, and yet for which he was altogether unprepared.

"You will stay with me, to-night, Robinson," said he, as having entered the hall, he turned towards his companion.

"Why, my dear Mr. Vernon," replied the solicitor, wiping his forehead, "I am, as you may well believe, always anxious to be of service to my friends; but, I fear, Mrs. Maxwell will expect me; I promised—"

"That can easily be arranged," said Vernon; "my servant shall be sent with an apology. You must yield to me to-night; I may want you—on business—professional business, Robinson."

"In that case," said the other, "what is to be said? always at your disposal, Mr. Vernon," and he followed his patron into the parlour.

"My dear brother, I am so glad you are come at last," said a young lady, as she hastened forward, and threw herself, weeping, into the arms of Vernon; "my poor mother!"

"Compose yourself—all may yet be well," said Vernon, pressing her cheek tenderly with his lips:—"where is Mary?"

"She is—"

"I should have remembered," resumed Vernon, hurriedly; "but, Charlotte, you do not see Mr. Robinson, who has been kind enough to accompany me home."

"And you have not seen"—and, with a hasty obeisance to the solicitor, the eyes of the young lady glanced towards a gentleman seated at the further extremity of the room—"you have not seen Captain Laurence."

"Ha! Laurence," said the banker, approaching him, and grasping his hand warmly, "I am glad to see you. You are come at a melancholy time."

"I heard of Mrs. Vernon's dangerous illness," replied Laurence, "and hastened hither, hoping to find her better than, I fear—"

"It was kind of you," interrupted the other. "You must stay here to-night. You know

my friend Robinson? Robinson, you have met Captain Laurence before?"

A cold and somewhat formal inclination of the head on the part of the captain, and a very elaborate bending of the body on the part of the solicitor, indicated the mutual recognition.

"But why are we all standing?" said Vernon, as if suddenly recollecting himself; "let us be seated," and waving his hand to the others, he flung himself into a chair, and, with compressed lips, and brows painfully knit together, he appeared to be endeavouring to check some strong inward emotion, which he feared might vent itself in words, or be detected on his pale and haggard countenance.

During the pause that ensued, Mr. Robinson had full leisure to remark, through his green spectacles, the vast improvement that had taken place in the person of Miss Charlotte Vernon, since he had last done himself the curiosity of critically examining her pretensions. She might be, in the opinion of Mr.

Robinson, about two and twenty years of age at that present writing. Her face had lost some of its former roundness, and was now of that oval shape so indispensable to beauty: it was, perhaps, a *leetle* too pale and pensive for the solicitor's taste; but present circumstances might easily account for that. But then her form had attained its full and perfect development; and, in a word, Mr. Robinson thought—and thought justly—it would be difficult to fix his spectacles upon a more charming creature. Such azure eyes! such clustering and auburn locks! such even and pearly teeth! Mr. Robinson felt it necessary to put a curb upon his wandering imagination and too susceptible nature.

As a relief from the pleasing pain caused by these furtive glancings, the solicitor directed his glasses and attention towards the noble form and handsome countenance of Captain Laurence. Is it wonderful that a combination of two simple ideas should have revealed to him a mystery? Mr. Robinson, apart from his professional avocations, and all the straightforward,

slanting, curved, circular, and zig-zag contrivances incident thereto, was a man of sentiment; that is to say, he had not perused so many novels, to so little purpose, as not to be aware that when a young and handsome couple were brought into juxta-position, they are apt to come together; nor was he so Mephistophelian a person as not to wish that they should do so. I will not undertake to say that a very tolerable chance of being employed in making out handsome marriage settlements, and thenceforward attaining the legal advisership of the captain, had not something to do with the complacency with which he regarded the lovers.

The pleasing reverie of the solicitor was abruptly dissipated by a sudden movement on the part of Mr. Vernon.

"Be so kind, Mr. Robinson, as to hand me the decanter and a wine-glass," said the banker, drawing to the table; "they are on the sideboard behind you. My throat is dry and parched."

"Might I prevail upon you, my dear sir," said Mr. Robinson, seductively, as he placed the wine on the table, "not to indulge too much to-night? Remember, we have already—"

"Pshaw!" said Vernon, taking the decanter, and pouring out a glass of wine, which he swallowed hastily, replenishing his glass at the same moment.

Mr. Robinson foresaw that another awkward pause was about to ensue, and began to apply his mind to a consideration of the topics most likely to interest the company present.

"May I hope," said he, "that Mrs. Vernon is not so very unwell as, from the message of your servant, we were led to fear?"

"Mrs. Vernon, sir," said the captain, observing that neither the banker nor his sister appeared disposed to answer the question, "Mrs. Vernon, it is to be apprehended, is in a very dangerous state; but—"

At this moment the door opened, and a lady of dignified presence, and almost majestic

person, entered the room. With a slight, and perhaps haughty bow of recognition addressed to the solicitor, she advanced calmly towards the banker.

"Horace," she said, in a low tone, "I wish to speak with you apart for a moment."

Vernon followed her in silence to the window.

"It was very wrong of you," said his elder sister, in a voice of mournful rebuke, "to have left us to-night. Your mother has felt it—felt it deeply, Horace; and the time is at hand when the reparation of sorrow will be useless and unavailing."

"I know I have been wrong—I feel it now; I do, by Heaven!" cried Vernon, passionately. "But, my dear sister," and he took her hand, "our mother is better; she will yet recover. Dr. Ellison is with her, is he not? what does he say?"

Miss Vernon shook her head. "We must not deceive ourselves," she said quietly; "my mother is dying. We have known it long.

This is no sudden blow, and it is now time that we should meet it with becoming resignation."

"I cannot—cannot, Mary," said her brother, covering his face with his hands. "Oh! it is too late now to think of retracing my steps. I have already advanced too far in a course which —but—" and he paused for a moment, and having looked round cautiously, continued in a lower tone, "my solemn assurance that the life to which I have too long abandoned myself shall be renounced—this might comfort her—might it not? It might relieve her mind—it might, perhaps, preserve her."

"Compose yourself," said Miss Vernon, pressing his hand affectionately; "for my sake, for your own, and for her's;" and she directed her eyes towards the other end of the room, where her sister sat weeping bitterly.

Vernon observed the look, and appeared impressed by it. "I will strive to do so," he said, with more calmness. "Yes, for your

sake, and for her's, I must bear this: it would kill her—no, no, I must not do *that*."

"Come, let me lead you to her now; she has been anxious to see you," said his sister; "collect your spirits. You will but distract the dying moments of your mother by a betrayal of weakness, which, upon such occasions, is sinful."

"True, true, you are right, as you ever have been," said Vernon, as he followed her from the room; and, as he ascended the stairs, he endeavoured to enforce upon himself that degree of calmness which, he felt, he must at least assume.

"Wait in the ante-room for a few minutes, and I will prepare her for your coming," said Miss Vernon, in a whisper, as she softly opened a door, and entered her mother's apartment.

The death of those we love, and whose affection for us we have ill or insufficiently requited, is one of those trials from which few, perhaps, are spared. We are none of us exempt from the

frailty of human nature, or from the consciousness attending it, which is its only palliation; and, at a time like this, the conscience is prone to magnify every slight into an injury, and every act of weakness into a crime.

Vernon was a weak man, but vice had not yet hardened his heart, and he had not hitherto seen so much of affliction as to render himself insensible to its approach. If he had ceased "to justify his actions to himself," it was because he feared to undertake the office; and he could not but feel poignantly at this moment that he had, upon too many occasions, neglected the performance of obligations which, at his father's death, he had held sacred. What would he not now have given, could he have averted his mother's death! what reparation would he not cheerfully make, were she spared to be sensible of it! But would he have made the reparation which his heart dictated? It will be seen hereafter.

The opening of the door recalled him to

himself. It was Dr. Ellison. He approached Vernon.

"You may see your mother now," said he; "but you must permit me to lay my injunctions upon you, not to protract your interview longer than is absolutely necessary, nor to advert to any subject which may be likely to agitate her. She is in too weak a state to bear any communication of a painful nature; you must therefore defer—"

"Defer!" interrupted Vernon, rising suddenly; "then we may yet indulge a hope, doctor, that my mother is not dangerously ill?"

The doctor took the hands of Vernon between his own. "I must be plain with you. No hope must be indulged, for it will deceive you. Mrs. Vernon cannot recover. Her last moments must not be occupied with matters that have, most probably, been finally settled before this. I have said enough. I remain here to-night, and am now retiring to my own

room. The servants have received orders to summon me, should I be required. Good night."

It was with trembling steps and a palpitating heart that Vernon entered the room of his dying mother. She extended her hand towards him, and received him with a faint smile. He seated himself in a chair by the bedside.

There was a silence of some minutes.

"Mary, my love," said Mrs. Vernon, with apparent difficulty, addressing her daughter, "You may retire for a short time. I have a few words to say to your brother, which must be spoken in private."

Miss Vernon retired softly from the room.

"I have wished to see you, my dear son," said the dying lady. "I had much to say to you, but my strength is fast leaving me, and it is perhaps better that I am forbidden to speak much. What I may omit to mention, will be recalled to you, when I am gone, more strongly than can be at this moment conceived."

She paused, unable to proceed; and Vernon did not, and, indeed, had no power to reply. He felt a presentiment, which conscience frequently superinduces upon less important occasions, that his mother was about to question him upon a subject which he dreaded to enter upon. Nor was he mistaken.

"My dear son," said Mrs. Vernon, at length, "you must forgive me for adverting to a topic which, of all others, is most painful to me to refer to; but I feel that I have delayed it too long; and, at a time like this," and she pressed his hand gently, "you will pardon my anxiety, and the abrupt manner in which I am compelled to address you. Your sisters' fortune—"

Vernon motioned, as if about to speak; but not a syllable passed his half-opened lips, and she proceeded—

"Your sisters' fortune, which they entrusted to you two years ago, and about which I know it is not their wish that I should speak—tell me—tell me frankly, my dear Horace—a mother

sees many things which one less interested would fail to observe, and I have marked an alteration of late in your appearance and manners. Have you been unfortunate lately? have you met with losses in your business? is their fortune secure?"

"It is—it is, by Heaven?" said Vernon, solemnly, but in a broken voice; "my dear mother, could you suppose me capable of injuring—"

"No, no," said Mrs. Vernon, faintly, "I know you better, Horace; but, with every wish on your part to be just and generous towards them, circumstances might have occurred to prevent your being so."

"Your apprehensions are groundless," said Vernon, hurriedly; "nothing has occurred, my dear mother, I assure you—solemnly assure you; their fortune is secure; I have taken care of that."

"I am satisfied," said Mrs. Vernon; "your solemn assurance was needless. I can believe

you, Horace, without such a confirmation. I could wish, however, for I have made no will, that the sum of two thousand pounds should be added to each of their fortunes out of my own property. Will it be inconvenient to you that I set apart that portion for them?"

Vernon sank upon his knees by the bedside, and was silent for some moments. "My dear madam," he said at length, and his eyes filled with tears, "you have ever been too kind, too liberal towards me, who have but ill repaid your affection. It will be my duty, and my happiness, to obey all your wishes."

"It is well, and I shall die happy now," said Mrs. Vernon. "Horace, I have one other point to impress upon you. Your elder sister will, perhaps, require little of your attention. Her fortune is sufficient to support her as a lady, and I know her principles too well to feel much anxiety respecting her future course of life, so far as it is to be determined by herself. But, respecting Charlotte, I feel some

anxiety—I should rather say interest. You know the engagement subsisting between Captain Laurence and your sister. He is an honourable man, and entertains a sincere affection for her. I wish, at an early period after my death, that they should be married. Do you approve my choice?"

"Perfectly," said Vernon, more composedly; "and I am happy he is below, that he may hear your consent from your own lips."

"I am glad of that, too, and I will see him presently;" and the old lady sank back in a state of apparent exhaustion. A shade of painful emotion, observed by Vernon, overspread her brow, and dwelt there for a time, and when she again raised her eyes, and directed them towards her son, there was a melancholy expression in the face, which, many times during her illness he had remarked, but which, at this moment, he had not fortitude enough to withstand.

"Compose yourself, my dear mother," said

Vernon, softly, "will you not try to get a little sleep? I will call my sister."

"Not yet—not yet. One word more, Horace. I had hoped, before my death, to have seen you, also, settled—I mean married."

Vernon started suddenly, and averted his face.

"Nay, nay," continued his mother, "I did not mean to awaken a remembrance which I had thought time had subdued. Forgive me; there is one thing that still weighs upon my heart. May I speak?"

He was silent.

She continued—"Who is this Mrs. Maxwell, at whose house you have been so frequent a guest? Horace, it is your mother who now addresses you, and for the last time. Let me implore you to break off a connexion—but it is not that yet—let me implore you to break off an intimacy with one whose acquaintance is no honour to a respectable man. Or, has the world slandered her? Is she a virtuous woman?

If so, for her sake you must relinquish her society; if otherwise, for your own."

"I will obey you," said Vernon, with emotion: "yes, it is better that it should be so," he repeated to himself.

"May I die, assured of that?" said Mrs. Vernon, anxiously.

"You must not talk of death," said Vernon, kissing her forehead. "In all things, as Heaven is my witness, and my judge, will I fulfil your wishes. Endeavour to compose yourself now;" and he arose, and opening the door softly, he recalled his sister, who, followed by Charlotte and Captain Laurence, entered the room.

"Robinson," said Vernon, as he advanced towards that gentleman, who had remained in the parlour below, "I believe you are my friend; I think, also, you are under some obligations to me, and would go out of your way to serve me."

"Really, my dear Mr. Vernon," said Robin-

son flurried, "I do not comprehend;—pray sit down. What is the matter? How can I be of service to you?"

"I will tell you," said Vernon hastily, and he closed the door, which he fastened; "Robinson, you may consider me a scoundrel, but I am not—I am not, sir."

"My good sir—"

"Two years ago, I borrowed ten thousand pounds of each of my sisters, for the purpose of entering upon a speculation which may yet prove successful. My mother is dying, Robinson—dying. She has been anxious to know that this money is secure.—It is so,—and I have said as much. It shall be so, Robinson, in a few days, and you shall do that business for me; but—"

"But what, my dear Mr. Vernon?" said Robinson, somewhat interested.

"In the meanwhile, I want that assurance confirmed; it will ease my heart of a load that oppresses it."

"But Mrs. Vernon surely does not suspect—" began Robinson.

"No, no, perhaps not," said Vernon musing; "but still—. Well Robinson, you will say that I have invested the money safely—that you know it—that I have employed you to do it, and that it *is* done."

"Surely," replied Robinson, "I can have no objection to say this, especially, my dear sir, as you purpose doing it in a few days. If any confirmation on my part be wanted, of course I am at your service."

"Come, then," said Vernon starting up.

"Where?" said Robinson in surprise.

"To my mother; one word will suffice."

"Good God! Mr. Vernon," exclaimed Robinson, who, although a man of no more feeling than he knew what to do with, and whose method of doing with it was, to thrust it to the very remotest possible corner of his bosom;—although a man of no great feeling, Mr. Robinson was a man of rather weak nerves, and

entertained a decided objection to death-bed scenes, more especially since the demise of the Earl of Charleston.

"My dear sir," remonstrated the solicitor; "only reflect for a moment—it would not be decent, it would not be proper to intrude at a time like this."

"True, true," said Vernon, striking his forehead with his hand; "it were horrible, too horrible to repeat that lie—coolly—coolly: no, no, you shall not go with me, Robinson, you shall *not* go," he repeated with energy;—"but do not stir from the room."

There was a knocking at the door, Vernon opened it. It was Dr. Ellison.

"Come directly," said he, "or you will be too late; your mother is dying."

Vernon hastened up stairs, and entered the room; Captain Laurence and his younger sister were kneeling by the side of the bed, one hand of his dying mother clasped in theirs. Miss Vernon was seated on the bed by her mother's

side, smoothing the pillow, and softly raising the head of the dying lady. "Horace," she said, "kneel down and take the hand of your mother; she has blessed you—she has blessed us all; she will never speak more;"—and as Vernon fell upon his knees, and took the cold and wasted hand of his parent, his sister turned, and rising from the bed, said solemnly: "Our mother is dead!"

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTED BY LEIGHTON AND MURPHY,
Johnson's Court, Fleet Street.

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